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HESTER
HOWARD'S
TEMPTATION

BY
MRS. C. A. WARFIELD.



HESTER HOWARD'S TEMPTATION.

A

SOUL'S STORY.

BY

MRS. C. A. WARFIELD.

AUTHOR OF

"THE HOUSEHOLD OF BOUVERIE."

*"And I! still gazing on that glorious child,
Even as these thoughts flash'd o'er her.—"*

*"Cythna, sweet,
Well with the world art thou unreconciled:
Never will peace and human nature meet
Till, free and equal, man and woman greet
Domestic peace; and 'ere this power can make
In human hearts its high and holy seat,
This slavery must be broken.'—"*

*As I spoke,
From Cythna's eyes a light of exultation broke."*

"REVOLT OF ISLAM"—SHELLEY.

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BOOK FIRST.

If the calm lake lay stilly
When tempests arose to deform ;
If the life of the lily
Were charmed against the storm ;
Thou mightest, though human,
Have smiled through the saddest of years,
Thou mightest, though woman,
Have lived unacquainted with tears.—ANON.

Sleep ! sleep ! and with the slumber of
The dead and the unborn,
Forget thy life—and love—
Forget that thou must wake forever,
Forget the world's dull scorn—
Forget lost health—and the divine
Feelings which died in youth's brief morn,
And forget me, for I can never be thine.—SHELLEY.

HESTER HOWARD'S TEMPTATION.

BOOK FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

A HOME THAT HAD NO HEARTH—A SO-CALLED MARRIAGE.

WHEN Hester Lynne was married to Julius Howard she had scarcely waked up from the dreamy uncertainty of her vague yet imaginative childhood, to the perceptions common to young maidens of her age. At sixteen she had no wish for admiration, no yearning for beaux or even for the society of either sex, no love for dress—nor had she built for herself any of those fairy castles of delight in the future to which her fancy and her years entitled her. The reason of all this deficiency is plain enough, when it is made known to the reader that her young life had been shadowed by a constant succession of domestic annoyances, and that her home was a miserable one.

Her father had married a second time in her early childhood, and died when she was twelve years old, leaving her to the care, or rather to the neglect, of a weak and contentious step-mother, surrounded by offspring of her own—a needy and clamorous brood—ever warring

for what they considered their rights, and consequently wholly unmindful of those of others.

No meal ever passed over without its bickerings and dissatisfactions—bad management was visible everywhere—servants caught the infection, guests shrank from and avoided it, children took advantage of it—all but Hester—her it blighted, as effectually as a constant fretful wind will unroot and destroy a fine carnation, which needs a steady support and temperature for its peculiar development. There are natures to which misrule is worse than despotism, if the last be consistently carried out—hers was of these.

The home of Hester Lynne had been one of affluence in her father's lifetime when his salary as judge, added to other means better managed than now, had provided, through his judicious dispensation, amply for the wants of all of his household.

Of this salary, however, nothing had been saved, for Judge Lynne, in the flower of his manhood, had scarcely thought of death as an evil near at hand, yet he left enough for a cheerful competence for all of his immediate family—at least as long as his wife and children remained under one roof—had it been wisely managed or justly divided. As it was, finery and poverty went hand in hand with irregularity and ill-temper. The remains of a wax-doll style of beauty (most repulsive of all others, perhaps, when faded) gave Mrs. Lynne undue hopes of contracting a second marriage, and blinded her—through the teachings of her vanity—to the woful impediments of her five ungovernable children, her own intellectual deficiencies, her slender estate, and the forty years that had already come to her when she doffed widow's weeds, and

emerged from her mourning chrysalis (a butterfly whose experience should have taught her better), to seek the renewed sunshine of matrimony—a sunshine that never shone upon her wilted wings.

Suitors came not, and disappointment did not increase her small store of amiability, and much of this ill-humor was wreaked on the only forbearing person over whom she held dominion. So a very callous mood came at last to the assistance of Hester Lynne (nature usually supplies its own defences, if possible, mentally as well as physically), and indifference and apathy formed her shield of safety against ill-usage. She had, too, it must be confessed, an inherent love of peace, almost amounting to weakness, an inheritance of gentle breeding from both parents, that sought shelter from altercation of every kind, and raised her in some sort above the atmosphere of strife and vulgar retaliation.

This delicacy of organization taught her to accept inferior clothing and tuition, disregard of her personal comfort and the position due to her as the eldest daughter of Judge Lynne, and the best born of his children, and even positive rudeness of speech and manner, rather than complain or fling back epithet, or disrespectful deed, or even give token through retort of humiliation or bitterness of spirit. Whatever she felt, her deep reticence of nature compelled her to retain, as did her proud and patient humility to bear.

Yet in this way was all the joy of her youth crushed out of her, and all the arrogant triumph, incident to its generous emotions, curdled to premature chillness and poverty of sensation. With no other resource than self presented, she took refuge in solitude from insult in

what her step-mother called "the dumps," and perhaps this was as good a definition as any other of her peculiar phase of wretchedness, dumb and scarcely self-conscious, as that of an ill-treated animal which suffers without power of analysis or adequate expression.

When Julius Howard appeared as the suitor of Hester Lynne—after walking home from church with her on a few occasions, and meeting her at a dancing-school ball, where she clung resolutely to the benches (knowing herself the worst-dressed girl in the room, yet well amused as a spectator), the surprise and delight of her step-mother knew no bounds, and overflowed in such a new strain of flattery and even cajolery towards one so long the victim of her spite, that it swept its object along in its current unwillingly yet irresistibly toward the fatal shores of matrimony.

Half frightened, half persuaded, the young girl found herself, after the acquaintance of a few weeks, engaged to a man of whom she knew absolutely nothing, and for whom she cared, if possible, less; and even from whom she had felt herself, from the first, steadily but surely repelled, by that instinctive sense of warning which serves all helpless creatures instead of judgment.

Yet there was no very good reason for this unexplained repulsion as far as could be casually observed. He that sought her hand was young, spruce, well-to-do as a thriving sprig of the law, and better looking than she was at that time, as the word goes, fair, florid, well-made, self-possessed, and above all, well-dressed, which last she certainly was not, though her own good taste taught her to prefer utter simplicity to such tawdry finery as was sometimes carelessly flung at her rather

than bestowed, or suggested as becoming. This inborn taste it was that showed her some incongruities between the garb and bearing of her lover, that were lost on duller perceptions, and might as well have aided her instincts when they decided against him. The sheen of his broadcloth never for one moment dazzled her true discerning eyes, nor did the presumptuous assurance of his manner overwhelm her, as it did most village maidens, with a sense of his superiority.

He had run the gamut of flirtation on the hearts of these fair and fluttered damsels before he approached Hester Lynne as a suitor, and it might have been her very indifference to his presence or attentions that determined him to woo and obtain her for his wife; for to men of his calibre carelessness like this is singularly provocative of passion. Or it may have been that in her modesty, her meekness, her pride, and the suffering that had helped to mould her countenance and manners into refinement, there was a nameless and unconscious attraction that impelled him to her irresistibly. Or it may even be supposed—but no! how could he foresee what even the wisest men had never foreboded, that the few wild lots and lands in and about a remote western village, which by sheer wire-working on the part of her step-mother, as one of her father's executors, had been allotted to Hester Lynne as her portion of the estate, should rise in a few years to such value as to enrich her. It would be giving Julius Howard more credit for sagacity than he deserved, to assign such calculations to his narrow if sordid brain; but that he sought the hand of Hester Lynne with rare pertinacity is no less true than that, having obtained it, he made her thereafter wretched.

From the moment of his declaration to that of the marriage of her step-daughter, Mrs. Lynne left no stone unturned to forward the proceedings. Her haste to get rid of her unoffending step-daughter was almost indecent, and the marriage followed the engagement with unwonted, and many said unnecessary, precipitancy.

Hester Lynne had ever been a silent reproach to her step-dame—a Mordecai at her gate—and the idea of having her house and property at last wholly to her own use and that of her lawless children almost intoxicated that scheming brain, which had however never yet been sufficiently prolific to imagine or contrive before any good fortune for this Cinderella of her house.

Little enough, as has been said, of either house or property had poor Hester ever laid claim to or received. Houseroom and heartroom had been both almost equally denied her at Briarheath since her father's death, and from the many dissensions that infested the larger apartment of her sisters she had been fain to find refuge in her fifteenth year (when by the behest of her step-mother her scanty school days were over) in a low fireless nook in the roof, miscalled a room, with a sloping ceiling of brown plaster, and only redeemed by its large dormer window from absolute repulsiveness of aspect.

Nestling in this window, which looked to the south and commanded a great reach of country, she had been in the habit for years of conning her school tasks, while between times her dreaming eyes were cast out and over the expanse before them with a sweet and undefined sense of peaceful power, that was inexpressibly soothing to her nature.

What small store of books and pictures she possessed

in her own personal right she had transported here years before, and her narrow bed and slender wardrobe were added to these, very unostentatiously and with but small assistance from others, one summer's day when the family had gone forth in full force to invade a neighbor, and she, partly at her own request, but not the less gladly on that account, had been left alone in charge.

Some pickling or preserving task had been deputed to her on that occasion, which she quietly neglected, making internal conditions of much future peace from the time gained by this omission, although its consequences in the shape of a terrific storm of words she well believed awaited her at evening, when her deliberate disregard of orders should be known. "Miss Hester had gone to bed," the servant said, when at dusk the family returned. "She was tired," Bridget reckoned, "going up and down stairs all day with her things in her arms, for, sure enough, she worked as hard as a nager to get through before you all came back, and she did most of the work herself, and faith she's sound asleep by this time in her own room in the garret, good sess to her."

There was something in this resolute and unforeseen move (the first wilful step that Hester had ever taken) that startled Mrs. Lynne, not out of her propriety but into it—something in those words, "her own room in the garret," repeated sadly enough by the old Lora, faithful slave of Hester's mother, and wholly devoted to the child of her first mistress, though rarely permitted to serve her, that smote perhaps harshly on what remnant of conscience remained to her. Judge Lynne's eldest born in the garret! the daughter of that proud first wife of his, who was so dear to him to the last day of his life! What

would he have said to such an order of things could he have foreseen it, and if it should get out what would the world say?

For there was a Mrs. Grundy even in that small inland town, before whom weaker women bowed down and trembled. Mean dressing might pass even with that sagacious dame, as sheer simplicity or want of taste, or a measure of necessity, but a room in the garret, where there were so many others to spare, was a bare and significant fact, from which there was no appeal, no shirking.

So the "neglect of duty" was wisely passed over or condoned on this occasion, and a feeble effort made to compel Hester Lynne to descend again to the occupancy of a couch in her sister's apartment, quietly but decidedly evaded by the refugee, who for once in her life gave signs of obstinancy and persistence.

"I suppose you want the oak bedchamber all to yourself," sneered Mrs. Lynne; "the only handsome spare room I have; or you would have me put your brothers in the ell, to have them running in and out through the back door as they pleased at nights; and turn out my white girls and put them in the garret, and have them grumbling and leaving me in the lurch, to put *you* in possession of a room to yourself! Or you would like sister Angeline, who pays her own board and helps *us* all, to squeeze in with Sophia and Melissa, Caroline and Mattie, and the nurse—to give you *her* room all to yourself, when she has never complained a minute about your being there, if you desired to room with her, although"—

"The present arrangement is far the most agreeable to *all* parties, no doubt," interrupted Hester, with unwonted

dignity and spirit. "Let it stand, I pray; you don't know how comfortable I shall be when I get thoroughly fixed; and now I want you to give me the carpet and the curtains that used to belong to the dressing-room in my"—she hesitated—"my mother's time. They have long been out of use; you won't refuse me, I know."

There was an unusual eagerness in the manner of the young girl that had its effect on the weak as well as overbearing woman she had to deal with. Had this oftener been manifested there can be little doubt her indulgences would have been greater, for even selfish people love to grant small favors when earnestly solicited and gratefully acknowledged. It raises their self-estimate and makes them fancy themselves generous benefactors and enjoy that ennobling consciousness at little cost. So Hester had her will, and to the old half-worn scrap of Turkey carpet, still carefully preserved by Lora, and the white and crimson curtains that suited its hues, too short for any other window, Mrs. Lynne added a curious little ebony secretary and work-table, all in one, with a quaint *tête-à-tête* tea service of red and gold stone china, covered with grotesque birds and flowers (the teapot having been nicely pieced together in divers places), which had belonged to her predecessor, and which evidently owed their origin to lands beyond the sea, China or Japan most probably.

She had always shrunk from using these articles with an undefined feeling of their individuality, which she could not separate from the deceased Mrs. Lynne, whose miniature on ivory, long hidden in this secretary, but forgotten now, passed unintentionally in this way and unostentatiously into the hands of her daughter.

Hester had never seen a picture of her mother before, and this little circumstance made her intensely happy. She studied the small oval mirror upon her wall more closely than she had ever done, in the hope of tracing some resemblance between her own and the sweet face accidentally and suddenly revealed to her by the touching of a spring, and which she could not doubt to be that of the parent who had died before her remembrance, though of this fact she feared to ask confirmation. Years afterwards she saw the similitude she then vainly sought for, but, at the time I write of, there was little to characterize her own face and form with any claim to distinctive beauty. She was slender, refined-looking, with dark blue eyes, a pallid complexion, carelessly kept waving chestnut hair, almost without gloss; lips that closed softly, never firmly, over sound, not brilliant teeth, and sometimes parted suddenly when she was wrapt in thought, as if they lacked muscular force, and trembled readily when she was moved, wearing at these times a singularly sad and even despairing expression. The lines that characterized her face and those about her nostrils and the corners of her mouth were indicative of sensibility and delicacy of feeling. These could hardly be defined in words, yet constituted the chief charm or rather interest of her tender and mobile physiognomy. The shape of her head and throat, hands and feet, were strictly statuesque; the first, however, somewhat too large for the Greek ideal. Figure, so speaking, she had none, at that immature age, nor did she attain her entire height until after her marriage, nor develope her full physical resources for years later, when health and energy became aids and abettors to increased loveliness of appearance.

I feel that I have not succeeded at all in bringing Hester Lynne before the mind's eye of the reader by this vague description, as I could have wished to do, had the power been given me, as to some others, of word photography, as she was in her green and callow girlhood, while her great powers lay supine, and unsuspected even by herself, and her whole world of thought and possessions was comprised in one little attic room, where a few hanging bookshelves, a few poor pictures made up her gallery of art and letters. Yet here her soul first began to put forth its wings.

There was very little purpose about her at that time, however, and an indifferent observer might have thought her the victim sometimes of sheer indolence or ennui, or, even worse, of mental frivolity. She would dream in her chair for moments that might have been better employed, it would have seemed, in repairing or renewing her scant wardrobe; or poring over the books that leaned against the wall, and gathering fresh resources therefrom, many of them in tattered raiment, it is true, yet wearing jewelled hearts within. Then suddenly starting from reverie, she would seize her pen and pour into the bosom of her only confidante such morsels of poetry or philosophy or a prayerful thought, as had shaped themselves in her brain, while wrapped in silent self-communing. Cries merely of a chaotic soul were these paragraphic productions, divided by dashes of an impatient pen, without continuance, connection or artistic skill, and often half erased from later convictions; cries of a soul groping in darkness, wailing for the light, or for a guiding hand to lead it forth to-day. Sounds merely like the inarticulate voice of a child lost in a labyrinth, having neither

clue nor goal, alternately hoping and despairing ; yet still impelled, as by some power beyond itself, ever irresistibly, on, on, to seek the outlet that must lead to light. All this was there heaped in strange and pathetic confusion in that great black book, embossed in velvet with tarnished clasps, an album (once her mother's) containing originally a few extracts from popular poems, in various handwritings ; a mere beginning of what that fiery soul under its mask of ice was destined to furnish or fill out rather, finding in such work outlet, comfort, relief, strength ; all that was elsewhere denied to it ; all that it required as imperatively for its sustenance as the body that contained it demanded its daily bread.

Even in her half dormant state of mind, Hester Lynne had instinctively recognized the necessity, so strong with all high-strung and reticent temperaments, of a refuge from imperfect companionship in the dignity of solitude, and it was with a true, if vaguely understood enjoyment of this privilege, that she now came, day after day, when her portion of toil for the common weal was over, to that hermitage of hers in the roof, where in heat or cold she was still secure from intrusion, and could surrender her whole being to the contemplative and ideal life which spoke so strongly within her, entreating to be heard.

Had the proper spirit appeared at this time, either in the form of suitor, friend, or religious teacher, the character of this emotional creature, so imperfect, so blind, so immature, might have been shaped and sphered at once into beauty, and order, and early perfection. As it was, experience and necessity were to do everything for her, and in their own way, by slow and sure degrees, monitors seldom persuasive, always inexorable.

Such was Hester Lynne at the time of her marriage with Julius Howard, and when they stood at the altar—he with his bright blonde hair and face and eyes, his shapely figure trimly arrayed in the height of the mode, his slightly supercilious bearing, so imposing to vulgar minds—she with her slender, drooping form, dressed in simplest muslin, her shadowy face, with its deep far-seeing eyes, so sad and strange, people thought who saw her then; her dark, unglossy hair, if such a word may be used, waving, yet lustreless, and over which hung no bridal veil flung by a mother's tender, hopeful hand; her parted lips, with their tremulous, pathetic expression, never more painfully apparent than now—there were not wanting many to marvel how that brilliant-looking man could have fancied that sad, dull girl, or to draw vivid contrast between them, sorely to poor Hester's disadvantage.

Had an angelic visitor been there present in disguise, of guest or spectator (it is a beautiful legend, reader, that tells us such things have been, and thus in all probability may be again), how different would have been his deductions from such a comparison! How sad would have been his contemplation of the reality, with his power to strip away externals and lay bare the future, when in the growing splendor of one spirit, the other should sit dwarfed and shrivelled on the ground, or slowly retrograding at last in its humanity and its gifts of grace and godliness, sink away, scowling and dark, into the outer night!

As it was, the transfigurement began even before they left the church. The face of Hester Lynne kindled as the marriage ceremony proceeded, and informed her in

its own majestic way, of the self-abnegation, the responsibility, the paramount duties that lay before her. It was the grand service of the Church of England, preferred by Mr. Howard. She had never heard it before: she never ignored later its solemn and impressive teachings, however stern the after struggle. She forgot everything now but her husband and her God. Her shyness forsook her; the crowd passed out of sight; the painful repulsion that until then had governed her was removed as by some merciful interposition of saint or angel in her behalf. She clung closely to the arm that supported her. Her reply rang out clear and distinct, "I will," in answer to the question of the minister. A bright flush suffused her pale, sad cheek, her lips closed firmly, tinted to beauty with their rich emotional crimson, her deep eyes glowed with feeling.

Duty had already transfused itself into a passion in her breast, and her path of conduct lay straight and plain before her.

CHAPTER II.

AN EXILE THAT BROKE NO TIES—NEW SOURCES OF
FELICITY.

HOWARD carried out a long cherished intention of removing to California, not many months after his marriage. He had inherited not long before a small patrimony which he thought might be advantageously invested in that land of enterprise and gold; besides, his profession was held to be a profitable one, where litigation was ripe over unsettled claims and title-deeds. He carried with him a batch of introductory letters, rather over-strained and stereotyped it is true, but none the less useful as an entering wedge in a community not over-burdened with good taste, or scruples of any kind, at that period. He felt that in all the advantages he possessed—health and good looks not the least among them—that he grasped the clue of a promising career. Many brilliant pictures of future aggrandizement flashed across his brain, and were transferred to the ear of Hester, as certainties, that time *must* develope.

She listened meekly, and half credulously in the beginning; but before two years had passed, her estimate of his powers was fixed unalterably, and a dawning distrust of his principles far harder to be borne was mingled therewith. However, that first year in California was after all a period of comparative happiness to Hester Lynne. It saw her settled in her own quiet home, and closed upon the birth of her baby boy, with whose existence her own being took in likewise a new birth, and

assumed fresh spirit, hope and energy. Old Lora had followed her fortunes—a tried and faithful friend—who shared all her joys and anxieties about her infant, and assisted her in many household tasks, lightened as these were still further by the presence of a sturdy Alsatian servant girl, called Pardette—a maid of all-work—who soon grew singularly devoted to her new mistress, like herself an exile in a strange country.

There was a large waste garden about the small house that Julius Howard had purchased in one of the suburbs of San Francisco (partly with a view to future speculation), hedged in with tangled roses, and filled with young trees and shrubbery in a state of wild yet not unpicturesque confusion. Some neglected strawberry beds were there, and raspberries and currants, bearing sparsely, grew rank and wild above the long, tall grass. A decayed summer-house, overgrown with honeysuckle vines and white roses, attested the former presence of some hand of taste and refinement, and indeed the whole garden evidenced the horticultural proclivities of its first possessor—an Englishman, who had lived and died alone (the last suddenly), leaving a few debts behind him, and no other ostensible means of paying them than this property presented. Thus it was sold cheaply, or rather sacrificed to his creditors, and Julius Howard became its fortunate possessor, and in the flush of his joy at the success of some petty speculation, or from some whim of the moment, forgetting his earliest intention of holding it for sale again, he settled it irrevocably a few months later on his wife and her infant son, Gilbert. "You see," he said, in extenuation of this folly, "I might die, Hester, or get killed in this rough country, and then you,

who are such a poor, helpless body, might be left homeless and a pauper; but now you will have a shelter at least."

She thanked him with real feeling: it was the first considerate act of any kind he had ever performed for her, and on this account alone she prized it. A few weeks afterwards he came home angry, disappointed, in a dumb rage with her and every one else, because he had put his property out of his own hands, and now must wait until she came of age to change the titles! Nearly four years must elapse before he could legally repossess it! It never occurred to him that she might refuse to resign her claims and those of her child, on the only estate they possessed that was at all available, even at the expiration of this time. He would readily have assumed the responsibility as legal guardian of dispensing with the infant's claims; but hers were imperative and fixed in law for the present at least, and he was obliged to decline the advance that had been offered him already on his purchase and wait on the future.

Thus Hester was secure of a home for the time being, and the feeling of permanence was very peace-giving to her nature, so averse to change, so shy of strangers, so contented in a nutshell, so wholly wrapped in the performance of her duties, and the necessities of her own existence.

I use this term advisedly. Her being had in its very organization many more necessities of internal commune than belong to natures more coarsely strung. To her time for thought and books was a necessity, as stringent as external excitement is for many women differently

bred and constituted. The old garden was a delightful and in the clement season unfailing resource, with its patches of green turf, its little open spaces where, with Pardette's assistance, she planted a few lettuces and peas, and annual flowers, and watched them grow and develope with an innocent earnest joy that sages might have envied, and surely would not have denied. This was her chief relaxation. She loved to pick her dainty way among its tangled bushes wet with recent rain, and smell the fresh mould and the subtle odor of the budding leaf and blossom. It was like a hint of Paradise by inhalation.

Birds were fed in the old summer-house to encourage them to come there and make musical its solitude. Thither she loved to transport her work (for she was now an assiduous needle-woman—motive supplying aliment for industry, never felt before), and with Lora and her idolized infant—hers was an unreasonable maternity it must be acknowledged—she spent her happiest moments thus and there, living with the utmost simplicity and frugality, for her husband partook of a hotel dinner, and came home rarely with any appetite for simple bread and tea and fruits. She had few household cares of any weight or importance, and acquired no habits of luxury or self-indulgence, if we except always the dreamer's privilege to lose a few useful moments now and then in reverie.

Still the habit prevailed (for what other rational companionship was hers?) of writing down each day something in the black volume or its successor, out of her own heart and life—truth always, and for self alone; and in this way she supplied vaguely the place of society

of which she saw and knew nothing, never stopping to question why this was, or whether hers was loss or gain, in such forfeiture of social compact.

The return of Mr. Howard in the evening or late at night, whichever it might be, was the chief excitement to her of the twenty-four hours, and in truth rarely a pleasant one. Whether he would come back bright, sunny, joyous, filled with boasts of successful speculation, or schemes of aggrandizement, tossing his child in his arms, to her own and the infant's alarm, and his excessive amusement; or angry, gloomy, depressed, in a stifled rage often, with low muttered curses hissed from between his set teeth, and the vicious odor of ardent spirits permeating his whole person, she never knew until she saw him arrive. But this furnished food for conjecture through the long evening hours, and damped the quiet joy that else had filled her childlike spirits almost to exuberance.

In the second year another child was born—a daughter, her mother's image—and another idol was set up in the temple of her heart, or the Arabian desert rather thereof, to be blindly adored; for maternity has different phases like every other passion of humanity, and in her nature it was all-powerful, sensuous as love, and as engrossing as religion, both of which were wanting so far to her, the creature of emotion, unconscious of her own needs, her own deficiencies, and yet instinctively working out her own destiny. And now that shaping of her face and form began, which I have before alluded to, into new beauty and a prouder mould, and as her latent character developed, and her intellect expanded with the slow perfection common to all noble things,

she, who had been almost plain in her unformed girlhood, and vaguely employed in a sort of shadowy wrestling with her own sensations, woke up to life, loveliness and energy, health and power, both of mind and body, in this magical maternal metempsychosis.

A young man, an amateur artist as well as physician, passing one day the little garden gate of her home in the remote suburbs in which she lived, saw her standing beside it, holding her six months' infant high above her head, with her face cast back, while she laughed aloud sweetly and merrily at its puzzled expression and soothed its fears with all a mother's tenderness, then in the next moment clasped it passionately to her breast.

He never forgot the image of this strange, beautiful woman and her lovely children, one of whom stood clinging to the skirt of her white dress while she caressed the other; the first, a boy, the very type of English beauty.

"What a sweet picture that scene would make!" he caught himself saying; "and the old negro woman with her picturesque head-dress, and the cottage in the background. I wish I could ask the privilege of sketching it, but, of course, that is not to be thought of when strangers are in question."

So saying he went his way to visit the poor French-woman across the street, who had not slept for many nights with her wearisome neuralgia, and to whom his presence had already brought such great relief, more than once. It was a mysterious thing, even to himself, this power he possessed of "laying on of hands," and soothing away the pains that flesh is heir to. He had discovered its presence when a little child, through his

ministry to his sick mother, but in later years it had been esteemed charlatanism by his professional brethren, and had hindered his success as a practitioner.

Still he believed medicine to be his true vocation, whatever obstacles incredulity might put in his path, or whatever superior seductions art might hold out for him. He would persevere, so believing, and do good even if he could not achieve success, and so carry out the intention of his Creator. Would there were more of the same mind—more instinctive workers.

Hester Howard was nearly twenty years old at the time when an accident threw in her way a person who wielded great power over her destiny, and was indeed the chief cause of the development of many sensations and aspirations that had so far lain dormant or at least with folded wings in her breast.

A barouche, driven by an awkward German at full speed over the precipitous street that bounded a corner of her garden, was upset near the cottage of Julius Howard, one autumn day, and its only occupant thrown out and badly hurt. With the assistance of Pardette and Lora, the German being occupied in restraining his plunging horses and reinstating his vehicle, Hester bore in the stout, middle-aged person, evidently lady-like, however, whose fainting condition enlisted all their womanly sympathies in her behalf, and when she came to her senses, the injured lady found herself lying in a cool, shaded apartment, on a wide comfortable bed, with white draperies about it, while two very dissimilar female faces bent eagerly above her, watching for the first signs of returning consciousness. They were those of Lora and Hester Howard.

"See, Doctor Clarke, she revives," said the sweet voice that greeted her back to life. "Come to her, come in haste."

And thus summoned, Doctor Clarke approached from the corner of the sofa on which he sat ensconced, waiting, with the patience of an experienced physician, for reaction to occur, after having done his part with the lancet.

"She will live, will she not?" spoken in low tones, so exquisitely emotional and sympathetic that they vibrated long on the ear of the sufferer—a revelation to one who had studied such signs a lifetime, and not without a purpose.

"Oh, yes, certainly. I never doubted that for one moment; but you women are so impatient, so incredulous—all alike, high or low. Madam, are you better? are you in pain?" rising and advancing towards the patient.

"Better, but still in pain. My arm, doctor."

"Sensible woman, she knows at least where her pain lies, which few of them do," muttered the doctor, as he gently raised the complaining member. "Broken. I thought so. Let me examine this fractured bone—not much harm done, I hope. Can you bear that, madam?"

"Oh, anything, anything for relief."

"That's right; that's right. Take a lesson, Mrs. Howard; you're a great coward, you know, about pain. Now can you assist me to set this lady's arm? it ought to be done at once, before any swelling takes place."

"I will try," said Hester, turning ashy pale; "direct me, doctor. Pardette, the cologne water," reaching out her hand.

"Pardette, no such thing! Here wet your lips with this French brandy," extending his flask, "take a good mouthful; now, madam, a little for you; there you will both be as strong as lions, now. A few minutes and all will be done; then patience, and the cure is perfect."

Hester helped the doctor set the arm of her accidental guest, and manifested a self-command that elicited a compliment even from his unwilling lips, "few men could have done as well," he said, "without experience." The lady bore the operation with unshrinking firmness.

The doctor called her "a soldier"—a common but very equivocal medical compliment intended for encouragement to females—then enjoining perfect quiet, he went his way, leaving her the occupant of Hester's bed for the time being with no alternative left to either party.

It was, perhaps, fortunate that Mr. Howard was absent on a collecting trip, or he might have demonstrated some dissatisfaction at this summary ejection from his own chamber of his person, by one who had no claims on his hospitality, such as men like him acknowledge, at least. So Hester had her sick stranger all to herself for some days, and ministered to her needs to her own satisfaction, without rebuke or complaint from the master.

The grasping German who drove the hack had insisted on waiting at the gate until the arm-setting was over, for his fare. His national patience had sustained him together with his pipe, until Pardette mischievously insinuated that the lady might never recover, as she still lay in an insensible condition; when, greatly to her surprise, he struck his head against the fence in a sudden

paroxysm of despair which she supposed to be an evidence of remorse or sympathy, at least, until she heard his ejaculations.

"Mein Gott! who ish to pay der fare, if der voman dyshe?"

When Hester, at last, gaining knowledge of his apprehensions, paid and dismissed him, it was with the understanding that he was to take an order to the hotel-keeper for certain portions of the luggage of Mrs. Carisbrook, the rest to be cared for until her convalescence should permit her to return and claim it personally; and Hester added a brief description of the accident with her own address, so as to allay anxiety, should such exist on the part of inquiring friends. When she told Mrs. Carisbrook of the precaution she had taken, that lady smiled at the work of supererogation, since there was not a soul in California she declared, except her son in Sacramento, to whom she was going, who knew of her existence, far less cared for it. Still she approved the forethought of her hostess, and had herself given the specification about the luggage she needed in her invalid condition, and this, consisting simply of bag and basket, was speedily transported to the little guest chamber, never before occupied, which Hester Howard had fitted with careful hands in one wing of the cottage, next to her small drawing-room.

Thither before Mr. Howard's return her guest was carefully removed; but a broken bone is not the same thing at fifty-five as at fifteen, and two months passed away before Mrs. Carisbrook was able to think of resuming her journey. By that time the rainy season had set in, the roads were impassable, and it was settled

between the stranger and the married pair that she was to be their lodger for the rest of the winter (handsome presents to the children having already satisfied Mr. Howard's cupidity as to the expense of her previous sojourn, although the spirit in which they were given made them alone acceptable, or even reconcilable to Hester), and a deposit made in the bank through his own hands having given him assurance of her capacity to pay for her future accommodations.

In the meantime Mrs. Carisbrook's son had heard from and written to her many times. His engagements, daily and positive, prevented his doing more. He was well satisfied to know her so well situated, he said, and would come for her whenever the roads were passable. He was reaping golden harvests she would be glad to learn, his wife and children well and assisting him as far as possible, still he needed more than this before he could be satisfied himself that he was doing his patrons justice, etc.

After reading this letter aloud to Hester, Mrs. Carisbrook looked at her puzzled face and smiled.

"Have you any Indian blood in your veins, my dear?" she asked.

"Not that I know of," answered Hester, with a surprised air. "Do I look like it?"

"No; but you are absolutely the only woman I ever met with who did not gratify her curiosity when she could, at any cost to others. Now confess that you have been wanting to know for some time past what my son's profession could be, about which I have purposely mystified you!"

Hester colored, laughed, and acknowledged Mrs.

Carisbrook's penetration, which indeed she had seldom found at fault. "And now you are going to tell me, I know," she added, "all about him and yourself too; for no one in my life has ever half so much interested me, and interest supercedes or sanctifies curiosity."

"Perhaps you will not like me as well afterwards," said Mrs. Carisbrook, shaking her head merrily, "but I must hazard that for the sake of the truth that is in me. Well, then, my son is the manager of the Sacramento Theatre, himself an actor, as is his wife, and as was his mother before him."

"You surprise me; you are so different from any estimate I have ever formed of actresses. Yet I confess my experience has been small, as I have never even seen one before, either on or off the stage."

"Then you have seen very little of the world, my dear child," retorted Mrs. Carisbrook, "very little, and to small purpose," and she shook her head gravely this time.

"Nothing at all," rejoined Hester, accepting the assertion literally. "My life has been singularly solitary, from first to last. I am a woman without acquaintances, as you must have seen, since you came to us; what is more, desiring none, outside of these dear walls, which enclose all the world to me."

"You embrace me then in your little world," said her friend, stretching out her arms with her characteristic vivacity of gesture, and before she knew what she was doing, Hester found herself clasped and clasping, as she had never before felt was a stranger's right.

"This is what Shakespeare called suiting the action to the word," Mrs. Carisbrook exclaimed merrily, while a tear trembled in her small bright blue eye. "I am truly

happy, now that I am sure no prejudice will ever divide us. I have always been a little afraid of this moment of revelation since I learned to love you so tenderly, for some how or other, Hester Howard, you have bewitched me."

"I never knew what companionship was until I knew you," said Hester, impulsively. Then checking herself, she added timidly, "My husband, you know, is necessarily much away from me; besides, men and women never assimilate, I suppose, as those of the same sex do."

Mrs. Carisbrook surveyed her with involuntary compassion, for she who had been twice married to congenial husbands knew, in their fulness, the superiority and perfection of true companionship between those of opposite sexes, into which enters neither rivalry nor jealousy, and where contrasts make common cause, if moulded by affection.

Yet she said nothing of this; she respected Hester yet more for her ignorance of the existence of a communion which she had never known; for even the common friendship of man and woman, with all its charms for the intellectual, is dangerous to the young and inexperienced, and it was best she felt as it *was*, best that this attractive creature, so unfitly mated, should remain unconscious of the narrowness of her lot, and the existence of men of a different class from her husband.

Mrs. Carisbrook was a noble and pure woman—if an actress—and slander had been shaken from her skirts like a serpent, whenever it had tried to attach itself there. She had walked unblemished through life, doing her duty perfectly as daughter, wife, mother, friend, and claimed the respect of every community in which she appeared.

Her experience was necessarily great of human nature ; but she was clear-sighted, not suspicious, and as no evil thing could blind her to a belief in its sanctity, so nothing pure and true ever received from her discrimination the stamp of evil.

She looked with eyes of disinterested admiration down into the clear if reserved nature of Hester Howard, as a hunter of the hills might do into a transparent stream among the rocks, long hidden from human eyes by the trailing hemlock boughs which he first puts aside to discover its crystal depths.

Intellect, too, was there, she knew from the beginning : the very poise of the head, the expression of the deep fountain-like eye, the dignity of the step, the expressiveness of every line of the face, the sweet and meaning smile, all revealed the presence of a thoughtful and powerful spirit, hiding away in silence, finding no response from any of its surroundings.

Mrs. Carisbrook, with her strong, clear sense, her varied attainments, her taste, her tact, her knowledge of the world, her talent, so peculiarly befitting her to sound the depths of other natures, seemed chosen by Providence to elicit the close-kept fires of the flint of Hester's nature, which only wanted the contact of the vivifying steel to warm to flame. And it was wonderful how rapidly this development went on. Six months of that suggestive society did more for Hester Howard than long years of a common round of visiting could have done, with its dull commonplaces and conventionalities. Her manner, naturally refined, acquired more confidence and grew genial, exposed to such pleasant influences. She cultivated her long-neglected music, with Mrs. Carisbrook's

aid. Books were added to her small choice library by Mrs. Carisbrook's suggestion. Mr. Howard insensibly treated his wife with more respect in the presence of this stranger within his gates, whose good opinion, with or without good reason, he was desirous to obtain, and whose manner assigned him his limits so perfectly yet pleasantly, that he never dared intrude his aggressive nature beyond those allotted precincts, and so grew unwillingly civil to all around, when in her charmed presence.

Yet the woman who exerted this power over both husband and wife, a power so salutary to both, was long past middle age, as we esteem it in our country. She was short of stature, robust, quick in all her movements, her skin was ruddy and weatherbeaten, her features imperfect, her mouth, still garnished with fine teeth, wide, frank, and smiling, her hair very lightly hued with gray, worn beneath a simple but becoming cap; her whole appearance benign and lady-like. She was an English-woman, full of energy and life, impatient of everything mawkish and morbid, yet a lover and respecter of true sentiment wherever found—a rare and noble character.

She loved her country, her religion, Shakespeare most of all things, after her own children; but she had room for much more in her expansive nature, and she received Hester Howard into the unfilled recesses of her fresh, true, wholesome heart with sincerest admiration, pity, affection and gratitude.

So this friendship had stable foundations, and was not built to rock lightly, whatever blasts might blow, as shall be seen.

I had forgotten to say that Mrs. Carisbrook was a

widow, having lost many children, only one of whom survived—her son, the manager of the Sacramento Theatre, the eldest-born of her first marriage.

She had for many years ceased to take any part in theatrical representations; was in independent circumstances, if not rich, which after all is a word of very comparative meaning; yet her vocation, for such she had considered it, still lay near to her heart, and nothing fired her blood more than to hear the drama decried, or to witness its low ebb in many places, and through many of its representatives.

She considered the writing of a good play the greatest of human achievements. Bulwer's dramas placed him in her estimation far higher than his novels, and next to the playwright came with her the player, if gifted, earnest, and successful.

These were prejudices that must be forgiven in our enumeration of her many good qualities, and did not unfit her to decide justly and accurately on most subjects connected with letters, morals, or manners.

It was not until the end of March that the roads were sufficiently re-established to permit Mrs. Carisbrook to depart. Mr. Morton, her son, a gentlemanly man of thirty-five, came for her as he had promised to do, remaining a few days in San Francisco on business of his own, while his mother made her final preparations to leave her hosts. They had been reading aloud together, Hester Howard and her friend, some of Shakespeare's finest plays, during that long, cold, happy winter that bound them so closely together; and one evening that Mr. Morton passed with them, Mrs. Carisbrook proposed that they should take up "Tempest," and let Mr. Mor-

ton see the result of their winter studies. Her real object was to show him how perfectly Hester entered into the spirit of Miranda, and how subtle and complete was her understanding of the master.

This play, above all others, was a passion with Hester Howard. She revelled in its wild, half savage grace, shaped to such exquisite refinement by the moulding hand of genius, nor indeed could a fitter type of that peculiar creation, the lady of the island, have been found, had one searched the world in quest of it. The shyness, the confidence, the grace, the inexperience, the modesty, the spirit, the passion wherewith Shakespeare gifted Miranda were all there, enshrined in the form of the obscure and lonely Hester.

The manager was enchanted. Hester's personation brought down the house (her husband was absent, as usual of evenings), and her small audience applauded her success—the one with all the partiality of affection, the other with the clear cool estimate of his order.

"A great actress was lost in you, Mrs. Howard," said Mr. Morton; "just such an actress as could coin gold for me and herself just now in California—ay, throughout the world. Think of me should adversity ever overtake you, and should you desire to aid your family by your own exertions."

"I should never achieve success in that way, Mr. Morton, I am sure," she replied with simplicity. "I am too shy; stage-fright would paralyze me; I should die of shame to be stared at by a thousand pair of eyes."

"You would not feel the many as you would the few," he said. "It is the vain, not the modest, that fear the many-headed monster; besides you would be very much

in earnest were you on the stage, as I saw to-night, and consequently self-absorbed, therefore *not* self-conscious. Now were you going up to join a church, or to be married, or to take an oath of a solemn nature in a court of justice, do you think you would mind the observation of the crowd at all, deeply absorbed as you would feel in your own proceeding?"

"I am sure I should not," and she remembered how all extraneous things had indeed sunk out of sight on her own marriage day.

"Well, this would be the same sensation to you, this of going on the stage, for first you would grasp a great motive in your wish to leave others and yourself; and secondly it is your vocation."

"Oh, no, Mr. Morton, not mine: my vocation is there," and she pointed to the sofa on which her children had fallen asleep, waiting for Lora to come fetch them.

"Cornelia redivivus," he said, smiling; nor was the subject resumed between them.

"I never was a great actress, my dear," said Mrs. Carisbrook after he had gone, "for two reasons; one was I wanted grace and beauty even in my girlhood, was simply good-looking and in a common style; another, I was too practical, and could not throw enough individuality into romantic creations, but I do know how to make a fine actress when I have the right material at my hand, and you, Hester, might stand with Miss O'Neal, as I remember her in my childhood, and not acknowledge her your superior.

"I remarked your voice even when I lay in agony on your bed on that first reviving to a sense of pain; its sweetness, its inflexions, its compass, soothed my irritated

nerves as music might have done. Your movements, your poise, your reticence, your secluded habit of life, strange and paradoxical as this last may seem, all befit you to be a great actress and stir men to the inner life. The very fact that you are natural, not artificial, a real breathing woman such as Shakespeare typed, would make the stage your fittest scene of action, for there you would dare to be natural as in the world you could never be, and give forth the soul of fire that lies under a crust of domestic conventionalities now, and that, I trust, may never, in real life, be thoroughly aroused."

"Dear friend, almost thou persuadest me," said Hester, laughing, and grasping the kindly hands extended towards her, "for, oh! to be with you alone would be temptation enough to pursue this walk of life, if all else were favorable. How shall I give you up? How live without you? What will my life be worth when you are gone?" and she flung herself in an agony of tears in her friend's arms. Mrs. Carisbrook had never seen her so moved, and they wept together in silent sympathy. It was a sorrowful parting; but their next meeting was infinitely more so, quiet as it was.

There was a sudden throwing off of the mask on the part of Julius Howard, after Mrs. Carisbrook's departure. He no longer disguised his drunkenness and debauchery, nor preserved a semblance of respect towards his wretched wife, which for some purpose (a disappointed one, perhaps, since Mrs. Carisbrook refused to place her means or any portion of it in his hands for safe investment) he had assumed during her stay beneath his roof.

It was indeed as if the guardian angel of the house had taken flight, nor could the frequency of kind letters

in any degree compensate for the presence of this useful, amiable, active, and restraining spirit.

The children, the servants, bemoaned her departure. Hester Howard sank into comparative listlessness. Her pillar of strength was struck away, and her morbid nature prevailed again as in her hopeless girlhood.

It was as if she cowered already before the heavy blow that menaced her from afar.

CHAPTER III.

THE SKELETON IN THE CLOSET — SORDID SCHEMES DEFEATED—BONDS BROKEN BY A BLOW.

SIX months passed away—six dark depressing months to Hester Howard, for they witnessed the rapid ruin of such happiness as had been granted to her, imperfect enough at its best. Her husband discarded decency now, as I have said, in his open profligacy, and when an unprincipled woman followed him one night to his own house and shook her clenched hand at him from the gate, proclaiming aloud their mutual shame and his unmanly cowardice, he dared not disclaim her charges.

Creditors hounded him to his bed-room, and broke in upon the privacy of Hester's sanctum, clamorously demanding to be paid.

The watch, the piano he had given her soon after their arrival in San Francisco, his only gifts of value, were sold to buy bread. Pardette's wages remained unpaid, yet still the faithful creature clung to them. "She could

wait," she said, "better days would come; monsieur was embarrassed now; all would yet go well." Thus she consoled herself and Hester, working harder than ever, taking in strange washing secretly so as to go to market on the proceeds, and laughing merrily when her mistress remarked the unusually long string of shirts hung out to dry. "Ah, madame, one must work a little for one's friends sometimes: it will not be long."

Overcome by the sudden flash of the truth, Hester turned away, humiliated to tears, and yet grateful, touched to the soul, as she was, by such disinterestedness as she had scarcely dreamed of in her philosophy outside of self, and with a higher estimate of humanity than she had known before, from that hour.

Youth and maternity, however, snatched even from these shadows of misfortune their own sunny glimpses of enjoyment, when the troubled presence of Julius Howard was temporarily lifted away. His breakfast over with its fastidious requisitions, and his absence for the day proclaimed by the harshly slammed door or final oath, and the disappearance of hat and umbrella from the rack in the vestibule, transient peace would settle down over the little household. The mother and children would quietly partake of and share the frugal meal that Lora brought to them. The cottage would be set in order, blinds and curtains disposed for pleasant summer or winter light, the work-basket, or book, or writing materials brought forward for use or employment, or the mother would go forth into the tangled shadowed garden in its season of verdure, to enjoy nature with her babes and watch, with delight, their glad and graceful movements as they glanced in and out among the shrub-

bery, the little brown head ever following the curly golden locks, as if instinct already guided feminine allegiance to the strong arm and the wilful brain of the embryo man.

She knew, too, how to train them to be good as they were happy, this gentle mother. They were taught to respect the maternity of the brooding ground-sparrow on her nest among the tangled grass, to understand that bees were God's workers that must not be hindered in their flight, and that it hurt the butterfly to seize and hold it by its painted wings, even if freed the next moment from the grasp of eager and impulsive hands, however small. She showed them how to poise tenderly the pretty spotted lady-bug on their dainty fingers, while she repeated those cabalistic rhymes all little children love, and they waited expectantly for the moment, when at their bidding the insect should spread her wings and seek her distant home, her house on fire, her scattered family.

She had never read the works of the Abbe Bartholemy, nor of Jean Paul Richter, yet she pursued unconsciously and instinctively the teachings of both.

She fostered the seeds of love and mercy in the hearts of her children, persuaded that in such growth all ill weeds would be extirpated, and she made them Brahmins in their reverence for life in the feeblest of God's creations.

She encouraged them to feed the cow that Pardette had tethered after the fashion of her own land in the central grassplot, with tufts of clover blossom and long nutritious grasses, gathered from fence corners and accidental blotches of verdure, not that much good to the animal was really

effected in this way, but that it made them grateful to the creature, which gave them more than half their nourishment and taught them to be considerate.

No beggar ever stopped at the gate to whom a crust and a mite were not sent through those little hands. She made them speak graciously to their attendants, to each other; they were not suffered to indulge their tempers at the expense of the comfort of their fellow-creatures—tempers never exasperated, it is true, but shielded away by all possible contrivances from unnecessary irritation or even recognition.

Young as they were, she taught them prayer, which had never been a habit of her own life because of early omission; and she who had felt neglect, and harshness, and the want of religious instruction as curses, resolved that, as far as in her lay, these evils should not be transmitted to her own offspring.

Thus she trained them in their humanities from the beginning, and so it fared, that sweeter nor happier children never climbed a mother's knee or filled her heart and soul with love and life, and hope and purest joy. Some compensation here, it would seem, for much that was bitter and hard to bear, some comfort for a spirit sore oppressed! Balmy lips to kiss away wild tears, pranks to provoke smiles even on the lips of sadness, love and life to bring momentary flushes to the cheek of otherwise hopeless despondency.

"They are so precious," she wrote once to Mrs. Carisbrook, "that I am afraid I shall not be permitted to keep them; and sometimes in the moments of my keenest enjoyment of their loveliness this thought dashes me, so that I put them away and cover my face with my

hands and imagine the dark, bleak, howling wilderness life would be to me without them. But this is ingratitude—I feel it at the next moment and so snatch them to my arms again, and kiss them wildly, and thank God dumbly for his many mercies. I believe that maternity is, as you once declared, my master-passion.”

My story lingers, its progress saddens me. I cannot bear to touch the culmination of its anguish, truth in one sense to me, though never realized; fiction, let us hope, to most of those that will read it.

I pause at the picture of a September evening, a young mother at her cottage door, her children at her feet, vines clinging to the trellis work of the little porch and framing in the whole picture. The day had been dry, and hot, and hazy; the sun was setting now, red and lurid as a globe of fire suspended on the horizon; yellow leaves were drifting from the locust trees that shadowed the low gate but a span removed from the porch, for the grounds, such as they were, lay behind and at the sides of the lowly white dwelling, and a strip of grass and pavement were all that divided it from the wide unpaved street, if such might indeed be called the passway running between vacant lots, with here and there a scattered house on its edge, like a sentry on the line.

Old Lora comes in haste to call the children to their supper, for the master appears, and it is a tacit understanding between mistress and servant that they are to be removed at his approach, until their father's true condition be determined, and so, further pain and degradation saved to all.

The gate slams heavily, burdened with ball and chain,

and a man enters, walking somewhat irregularly, and throws himself on the step beside the pale woman, who sits stolidly, after a slight greeting, looking out on space. It had been a long time since any marks of affection had passed between that wife and husband. He knew that in return for all his unresented brutality of speech and deed she barely tolerated him, and under such circumstances even this was much. Endurance is the born virtue of necessity!

"Have you any cool water, Hester?" he asked.

She rose and brought him a glass. He drained it at a draught, smacking his lips afterwards.

"I was d—d dry, you see," tossing his hat on the floor. "Wipe my forehead, will you? get the cologne, a fan, my linen coat. There now, Richard's himself again," and as he made this trite quotation he smiled and glanced towards her, who in the eyes of man, not God, was his wife.

She had quietly obeyed all his directions, promptly, yet silently, seating herself a little apart from him, and signing to Lora that the children might come if they desired to do so. He was not very drunk to-night, and they filled the terrible chasm between them. Anything but a *tête-à-tête* now! Any refuge from falsehood and abuse: one or the other is sure to come without restraint. He marked and recognized the signal.

"No, let the brats go," he said, harshly, "bed is the best place for them to-night. I want to talk with you, Hester, with you alone. I have no other time for this than evening, my business detains me all day. You never seem to consider this at all," querulously.

She looked at him with wondering eyes. It did not

seem business to her to haunt a billiard saloon, or lounge in a tavern porch, as she knew he did from morning until night; but what do women know about such matters? This might have been his mode of achieving his golden ends, long boasted of, long unattained, and which now seemed farther off than ever to her mind. Yet she only said,

"If you have anything to say to me I shall be glad to hear it, Mr. Howard. I am sorry to have displeased you."

"Do you know, Hester," he said, maliciously, "that I think you are a very much changed woman, d—d changed, since that old Carisbrook madam stayed here? I declare you are quite grand and theatrical—you that used to be so simple and waxlike in one's fingers."

"You, too, are changed, Julius," she retorted, "or rather—" she hesitated.

"Rather what, Madam Diplomacy?" said her husband, fiercely; adding in a moment, sneeringly, "Julius forsooth! You are quite familiar and patronizing all at once. It has been long since you gave me my name before."

"You forbade me, you remember, to employ it, alleging that it detracted from your dignity before Mrs. Carisbrook. I have simply obeyed you, but I forget sometimes."

"I hate a woman that is cream to her fingers' ends," he said, slamming his fist down on the chair beside him. "Why don't you get mad and over it like other folks of your sex? There's Jack Carroll's wife—"

"Don't speak of *her* to me," and she laid the tips of her fingers lightly on his arm; they trembled with ex-

citement, calm as she appeared. "You know what you told me yourself about her months ago; she is neither wife nor woman," she murmured.

"By G—, madam, it delights you to snub my acquaintances; when I brought Captain Bynam to see you—"

She spoke decidedly now, interrupting him.

"I simply refused to see him, that was all. One glance from my window convinced me that the man was drunk; *you might* not have perceived this, Julius, as I did."

"Everybody's drunk in your estimation, that don't sip tea and dote on babies. You'll say next that I am drunk to-night."

"Not very—no—I almost wish you were: I could excuse your rudeness better."

"And I repeat, madam, that you *are* changed since old cat Carisbrook took you in hands, and you retorted," rubbing his head. "What? Oh! I remember, now," mimicking her calm manner; "'you, too, are changed, Julius, or rather'—now again I demand," speaking in a voice of thunder, "rather what, madam?"

"Or rather I have found you out since then. Good-night, Mr. Howard," and she rose.

"No, by G—, you don't go till I have done with you. Sneaking off, eh, to bed like a sick cat to her kittens! I came home early on purpose to talk with you, and talk I will. Found me out, indeed!" he muttered, laughing low; "that's rich, quite a hit. But come, Hester," he continued, suddenly changing his tone, "we've carried this matter far enough, old girl," and he drew her to a seat beside him, by throwing his arm

around her waist. "You know I like you better than all the rest, no matter what I do; and I'm going to turn over a new leaf, I am, indeed, and play the devoted husband from this time out; for it is all flummery this sort of dissipation that is the fashion here. But you see every man has to sow his wild oats some time or other, sooner or later, and mine were a little late, that was all."

"And what a harvest they have already borne you, Julius!"

He did not check her this time for the use of his given name, and she passively endured the kiss he chose to deposit on her cheek, for in her heart love and respect were dead, and duty, so potent in her nature, alone remained to sustain their relation.

"Hester," he said, after a long pause, "I am going to try to do better. Let us pay our debts, leave San Francisco, and begin life anew. You shall be proud of your husband yet."

She made no immediate response.

Oh, bitterness of incredulity! Does fresh flame light dead ashes? Can confidence, once lost, be restored? Does the renewal of feeling depend upon human will? If so, who would not count delusion as his or her truest friend, making at least the inevitable draught we drink in uncongenial companionship less unpalatable, less unwelcome by such disguise?

"It is a good resolution," she said. "Julius, keep it; then I will go with you."

"Would you let me go forth alone to the conflict?" he asked, in a sentimental commonplace tone; turning her averted face towards him with one hand, while he still confined her waist with the other. "Would you

forsake your husband, and consign him solus to contend with new scenes and fresh temptations? No! This was not what I bargained for when I married you, Hester; we are one flesh, and must cleave through life together."

He could not have suggested a necessity more distasteful to her at that moment. She shuddered slightly. He felt it, and relaxed his hold.

"I believe you are tired of me," he said, darkly—"disgusted!"

She did not notice the remark, but went on calmly to state what was passing through her mind.

"I have thought of taking a little school lately," she said. "Now that my own boy is nearly old enough to be taught, and owning the house I live in as I do, I could support myself I am sure very comfortably, and the children, while you are marking out a new path. I am not willing to give up my home until you have another provided; beside, renters destroy property, and this you know is entailed."

"But what does that amount to, Hester?" he wheedled. "By-the-by, my resentful little wife was twenty-one years old to-day, and her husband remembered her birthday. He did indeed!"

"For the first time then, Julius," she laughed and shook her head, her good humor returning with his. "Don't you remember how I scolded you two years ago for never having brought me a birthday gift, or congratulation even; yet, last time it was the same neglect, and now, what put you in mind of it, Julius?"

"I don't know; your hauteur to me lately I suppose, which has almost killed me, though I was too proud before to tell you so."

"Too proud!—too vain!" she murmured.

His quick ear caught the sound.

"Well, have it your own way; but the proof of the pudding you know, etc. Now, here is my testimonial of remembrance."

And he drew forth from a case a brilliant ring of no great intrinsic value, an opal set with diamonds, the stones all small.

"See, here's your name and age engraved inside. Now doubt me again, will you?" and he touched her chin lightly and kissed her brow, looking at her admiringly.

"Thank you," she said, putting it on her finger. "It is very pretty, and I am obliged to you for remembering my birthday, which was never kept before since my father's death." She mused over it, bending low to hide her tears.

"It will do to buy us bread with when we are starving again," she thought to herself; remembering the fate of the watch and the piano, the very remembrance of the last sacrifice an ever ready sting. But she said nothing of the kind to him, merely standing in silence more puzzled now than pleased, for her keen insight into his character told her that something new and strange, perhaps wrong, was at hand, and already she more than half surmised the truth.

"A purse of gold besides for your winter's wardrobe, and the children's," he added, laying a somewhat weighty net-bag beside her. "Now who shall say your husband is not a good provider, not proud of his handsome wife and bonny bairns?" And again he kissed her.

The whole proceeding startled and mystified her.

"We will go into the house now," he said. "I

see Lora has lit the lamp in the dining-room: we must finish our business there," and he drew her after him.

A table and light were in the centre of the apartment (that lying directly behind the small square hall or vestibule of entrance), both visible from the front door, and approaching the table now, Mr. Howard deposited thereon a small bundle of papers which he drew from his pocket, and reaching down an inkstand from the mantelshelf, observed calmly:

"Come, Hester—come, my love!" (a new word in his vocabulary.) "I want you to sign this deed. I have sold our house, and you hold the earnest money in your hands."

"But *Gilbert*; Mr. Howard!"

"Oh, that matter is easily disposed of. I will run all the risks of his displeasure—I, that am his natural guardian; besides, it will be a long time before his majority. Who knows what may occur? He may die between now and then."

"Die! Oh, Julius, how can you bear to speak that word of him?" and she covered her face with her hands. "Die!" she said, looking up suddenly. "God *would* not permit such a thing." The inauspicious word seemed to have struck some deep chord in her nature, for she stood lost in thought, sighing and shaking her head; with her hands clasped tightly over her breast. "He *must* not permit it," she murmured, after a time.

"I hope not—I hope not," he said, hastily; "but, there, you are off the handle again. You see I have a first-rate offer for this place, more than twice the money I paid for it, ten thousand dollars down. You have five

hundred of it there in your purse, and the rest will pay every debt I owe, and set me up handsomely somewhere else. San Francisco is too expensive a place for us to sojourn in."

"Expensive? I have never found it so," she remonstrated mildly.

"What! with flour at fifteen dollars a barrel? you are ignorant of prices, Hester."

"Yes, but it lasts so long as we use it, and Pardette raises all our poultry, we have our own eggs and what vegetables we use, and our cow gives us milk and butter; surely we spend but little! As to clothing—" and she paused.

"You forget my part of the necessities, madam," he interrupted impatiently. "They are greater than I can afford. Appearances must be maintained."

"You, Julius, with your habits, would find any community expensive," she rejoined, and her cheek flushed at some reflections thus suggested, not very creditable to him as a husband or pleasant to her as a wife.

"Have I not said I meant to change all that?" he asked with asperity.

"Ay, you *said* so," she replied, in a low, steady voice, looking down determinedly.

"Come, Hester, sign; what is the use of argument? My word is out for the sale of the property, and you know a wife's duty under such circumstances," and he thrust the pen into her hand, first dipping it in the inkstand.

"I also know a mother's," she said, quietly. "I shall not sign this deed, Mr. Howard," and she laid down the pen. He paused in his occupation—that of smoothing the paper before her, and pointing out the exact place

where her signature should be affixed—and gazed upon her with a face convulsed with surprise and anger.

"You do not mean to refuse me," he ground from between his set teeth.

"I cannot do violence to my conscience, Mr. Howard. I *must* decline to sign this paper that gives Gilbert's heritage away. We have no right to do so, this I feel."

She trembled a little, for she dreaded a scene more than most people do, and yet being resolved on her course, had every reason to apprehend one.

"I give you five minutes more to decide in," he said, huskily, "and at the end of that time—" he hesitated, interrupted himself, and began to walk the room, while she surveyed him with a cold, stern smile. The implied menace brought back her courage.

"Have you come to your senses?" he asked suddenly, pausing before her, after the lapse of a few moments, "are you ready? Come, take your pen like a true woman and do your husband's will."

"Not in this case," she said, holding up her right hand, and looking him full in the eyes. "Not in this case, Julius Howard, so help me God!"

"But I will compel you," and he rushed towards her frantically. She put the width of the oval table between them; he reached across it, upset the lamp as he did so, and before she had time to avoid the blow, struck her furiously full in the face with his clenched hand.

The blood followed his fist, flowing freely from nose and lips; she staunched it with her handkerchief, staggered a moment, then with a great effort came to her feet, clung to a chair for an instant, then taking advantage of the gloom, left the room, was gone to her chil-

dren's chamber and safely locked in with them, before the infatuated wretch recovered sufficiently from his frenzy to put forth his hand again, this time to grope after her in darkness, and if found grasp her and drag her to a seat.

An hour later found him buried in his great cushioned chair weeping like a child, tears of maudlin rage and regret, at the consequences of his impolitic and ungoverned passion, in his own bed-room.

"She will never forgive me, never! I know her well. She hates me anyhow, I believe; as to signing, that is all out of the question now, and the gold will have to go back where it came from, and the ring—no, let her keep that—it came easy by cards—if she will, for a make-piece. But what claws she is putting forth, to be sure, out of that velvet paw of hers! What a demon I have to deal with! Great God! can't a man be master of his own house, his own property? Have I lost all my original spirit in this saturnalia I have been keeping in the pandemonium of the world? San Francisco—hell—the names are synonymous, I believe." After a long pause, and a sentimental use of his handkerchief, on which he has poured all the eau de cologne from his wife's toilet bottle, long treasured for emergencies. "Stop, she is penitent after all! I think I hear her sobbing; no, it is only the rising storm, I believe. I will go to the door and knock; no, I had better not, I fancy; let her sleep it off. I never tried this experiment before." With a faint hysterical laugh, meant to be self-encouraging. "It is the very thing probably. The very thing for the emergency. Hit the right nail on the head this time, Julius Howard, old fellow. Women and

spaniels, says the proverb. Faugh, what a fool I am! Don't I know—*don't I know* that I have lost her *forever?*" Another burst of baffled rage in the shape of tears, with the hands wreathed in the taffy-colored hair, redolent with barbaric odors (a poor pun, his own, one that *he* made frequently). "How the storm howls! It is dreadful to be all alone in this room! white everywhere, like those they dress for funerals. Stillness like death within there. I believe I will waken Pardette, and ask *her* to sit up with me. Ho! who knocks?" starting wildly from his chair. "Pshaw, it is only the blast against the window: hear the rain how it pours. What if I should find her dead in the morning? Dead by her own hand—she, the only human being I ever loved in my whole life. There is no knowing what might come over her, she is so strange, so different from all others; so great, so lovely, so true, so much too good for me or any other man I ever knew. What *would* Doctor Clarke say if he knew of it? But I know she will never whisper it to him, deuced old fogey. Mrs. Carisbrook, perhaps, that English cat. Well, I don't care, I don't care: she had no right to oppose me; she vowed at the altar to obey, honor, and all that sort of thing. Flam! there goes the candle. Darkness! and the lamp broken to pieces, and the oil all spilt, by that accursed random blow of mine across the table—what possessed me? Twelve o'clock, and the whole night before me. What a flash of lightning! that thunder-peal shakes the house. No man was ever more wretched; no matches at hand, and *not a drop to be had.*" Close we the soliloquy here, not more silly than sad.

The subject of the sale was not renewed, nor was the

blow ever alluded to again, though it separated them as effectually, that uncongenial man and his wife, as if seas lay between them. Hester did not keep her room in consequence of it, but did keep the ring that had come into her possession, the very contrary of which would have been the case had she felt either affection or respect for the person who had outraged her.

Strangers could have seen no difference in her manner to her husband thereafter: he saw little himself. She studied his creature comforts, his welfare as of old, served him in health, waited on him in sickness, consulted his tastes, made ready for his coming, submitted to his humors; but still he knew very well that the pedestal he flattered himself to have once held in her heart was empty. Indeed it dawned upon him in the course of his ruminations that his petty statuette had been rocking there some time before its final overthrow.

He never hazarded anything so decided again in the way of despotism as personal chastisement, but he had his own way of inflicting tortures worthy of a Japanese, his greatest mortification being that his victim grew more and more insensible each day to such persecutions as he dared to wage, and baffled him by her immovable repose.

It is a satisfactory thing to see one of the weak tyrants of the earth fall under the power of one of those mild, forbearing spirits, who rise up at last in plenitude of majesty and put a calm foot upon his reptile stings; and whether this be in the case of man or woman, it is equally refreshing to the just mind.

I for one am so devoted to practical justice of this order, that I would, if I had the time and power, go forth crusading over the whole face of the globe, in order

to settle in every family the sceptre in the right hand, be it male or female, nay, were it in that of the youngest child in the house; my motto being—

“Let the just rule over the unjust.” Arcadian maxim long discarded.

Don't you see, dear reader, what a perfect world this would be, were this simple law only carried out?

Some strange reverses would occur, no doubt, some strange results follow, but the end would be universal happiness, and this is *the great end*.

All this time a fiery sword is hanging over Hester Howard's head ready to fall, the hair almost severed in twain that suspends it in mid air, and she in stern, calm unconsciousness sits beneath, looking forward from her sad estate with eyes of earnest expectancy, to hopes that shall never blossom, to joys that shall never be restored. Pity her!

CHAPTER IV.

DEATH AND HIS BROTHER SLEEP—THE STRANGER ON THE SILL—BEREAVEMENT AND DESPAIR.

OCTOBER passed, golden, bracing gorgeous; November darkened down upon the land, and with it came storms and pestilence. A malignant fever was stalking through the city, in the thickly settled portions of which whole streets were decimated of children chiefly, and the voice of lamentation, Rachel refusing to be comforted, was heard from many homesteads. But apart and away from all immediate knowledge of death or in-

dividual interest in its victims, crushed and dismayed, too, by the rapid strides of poverty and its incessant pressure, which restricted even her frugal table, the light of her cheerful lamp, the presence of early fires, which she had always enjoyed almost with sensual delight, or the slightest addition to her already attenuate wardrobe, she of whom I write was shielded from anxiety that might otherwise have corroded her spirit, and found the evils of the day indeed sufficient.

About this time she was gladdened by a letter from Mrs. Carisbrook, asking the privilege of becoming her lodger again through the approaching inclement season. Her son had leased and would open the new theatre in San Francisco, and lodge with his wife and children for a time in a hotel. She much preferred the seclusion of Hester's home and her dear society to any inducement California taverns or the society of strangers could offer, and until Mr. Morton determined whether or not he would settle in San Francisco and possess a home of his own, she wished to remain with Hester.

The offer was gladly closed with, which promised bread at least, and fuel and clothing for all; and Hester went to work with renewed energy to prepare Mrs. Carisbrook's chamber. When all was done she stood and surveyed it and the results of her own industry, like a pleased child. It was a very pretty place to her simple fancy, that small square room with its little southern bay window festooned with running roses, which hung out their brilliant scarlet balls, at this season, among leaves still green and plentiful, kept fresh by the recent autumn rains, and it was furnished within with exquisite neatness and simplicity.

The cottage furniture of white and gold had been very carefully kept, and corresponded well with the window blinds and the velvet carpet (a white ground over which rosebuds seemed to have been thickly strewn), the only article of luxury in the house, and which had been intended for the parlor in the beginning, until found to be a scant pattern, and so consigned to the guest-chamber. Slight lace curtains were disposed around the bed and across the window, in the recess of which stood a marble-topped table covered with choice books. The chairs and sofas, originally cane, were cushioned now with blue silk made by her own hands from the remnants of a certain blue brocade dress which had been stained irretrievably in many places by the sea-water in coming round to California from Norfolk, and which had formed a principal feature in her inconsistent trousseau. There were domestic footstools to match, and a work-basket of the same fabric raised on a wicker stand, which by devices, known best to ingenious needlewomen and housewifely upholsterers, had all been contrived out of that same ample blue brocade gown, so as to conceal or cut out the ugly yellow stains that so disfigured it. To do all this for Mrs. Carisbrook's sake was a labor of love, and the children aided, rather than retarded, her by their cheerful presence and sympathy; handing a pin here, a spool there, holding the threaded needle until it should be wanted, with grave importance, or the tacks and hammer which made the whole fast and firm, and then rejoicing generally in gamesome fashion when all was completed.

Hester found herself absorbed in Shakespeare again at Mrs. Carisbrook's approach. "I will master the part of Portia," she said to herself—a favorite one of hers.

"Yes, every word of it before she comes, it will please her so greatly, and she shall teach me to fill it out with her experience, but I do believe I could play this part even better now than that of Miranda. I think I could imagine myself Portia as I never could Miranda, and become transfigured, and conceive Shakespeare's idea so perfectly that, holding such a clue, I could not go wrong. But Mrs. Carisbrook is the best judge. She will see whether I have succeeded and tell me frankly. Perhaps I may still be compelled to put forth what powers I have for the sake of these dear ones; yes, even for yours, poor benighted Julius, cruelly as you have used me. O God, give me strength and will to do thy work, whatever that may be."

It was a nightly thing now for Howard to come home drunk, and go reeling and cursing to his bed, in which he took his breakfast at noon next day—the only meal deserving such name prepared in his house during the whole twenty-four hours. Having devoured this frugal food, often so painfully obtained, and so carefully set aside, he would rise, dress himself in a leisurely manner, assume an injured air while dressing (his clothes had been numerous, and were still handsome, kept as they were by careful hands in constant and thorough repair), then with a word or two to Hester or the children—generally spoken in a half grumbling tone—he would lounge through the hall, and seizing his hat and stick, and lighting his cigar, set forth carelessly on his way to his office.

An imaginary destination was this office—shared by three or four other doubtful lawyers, although the name of the original occupant still figured largely on the door-

cheek, a warning rather than attraction to all who wanted business promptly and thoroughly attended to. A celebrated gambling-house was the true lounging place of Julius Howard, and in return for certain services, he carried thence at the end of each week the scanty means which served to support his family, most of which he absorbed in his own person. But this occupation was only suspected by most persons, and his bullying and supercilious manner obtained for him some show of deference from those who frequented its halls. He had brought fair credentials when he came to Eldorado, and he still built upon these and the repute of his family, of which, indeed, if it had ever been an influential one, only a name survived.

Howard was a good name in Maryland, whence he pretended to have sprung, and perhaps did spring. This is certain, however, that even Hester never knew his exact origin, or where his childhood was past, or saw or heard of any relative of his. When, however, a note had to be addressed to him on business or for social purposes, he managed to receive it if left at the office among his chums, who ate, slept, and cooked there (having no other domicile, or means to obtain boarding elsewhere), and clubbed their dimes so as to keep body and soul (or what passed for the latter) together, with thriftless thrift!

One day Pardette came panting to this office, whose location she scarcely knew before, and not finding Mr. Howard, began in an incoherent and broken way to beg the young gentlemen (one of whom was lounging in front of a filthy coal-stove, spitting spitefully at the embers; another tying on his cravat with a jaunty air before a

cracked mirror suspended on the wall) to go for her master, who was much wanted at home. "Oh, very badly, indeed!" she added, and tears rained down her poor weather-beaten face so little shielded by her tight-fitting Alsatian cap.

"Why, what's the matter, young woman?" said Lan Clinton, turning stiffly from the glass; "and by all that's holy, what case of distress *can* Jule Howard administer to?"

"Oh, sir, de poor children are so ill, and my mistress half distracted, and de fadder away, and no one to help us at all but old black Lora, half crazy herself I mus tink, for she lies on de floor moaning all de time, and Doctor Clarke, with many sick, only able to come now and den. It was dis good fren himself who sent me for Mr. Howard, saying he must come home on de moment. We have not seen de master since yester morning."

"A wife and children! Why, I never heard mention made of *them* before," said Will Connelly, rising from his position and turning his back to the stove with his hands behind him, and his coat-tails flying out on each side like lappets. He was a short, thickset young man, with a shaggy head of dark hair, a broad, handsome, determined face, ruddy cheek, and a kindly eye; his mouth half hidden by an ill-kept moustache, but his curved chin beardless and characteristic.

"Oh, yes, sir; a wife and two of de sweetest children, de angels in heaven are not more innocent dan dey, nor more pretty; but dere is little hope," and she hid her face in her apron and wept aloud.

"Do take her away, Connelly," said Clinton, fastidiously settling the knot of his cravat. "You like that

sort of thing ; I don't. You are in for scenic effect, I go for repose. Where can the Ethiopian have deposited the hand-basin and the water-jug? Oh, I remember, now. Dexter fractured them last night on his late return, under the influence of—aw!—lager beer; not very dexterous, it must be confessed. Hah—ha—good! must remember that. Howard will enjoy it. It is a pun very much in his style,” drawing out the last word very ludicrously. “Just as I thought! there jogs Connelly with the little peasant. Ugly creatures all these foreigners are. No interest there that I can see. Gone to hunt up Howard, I suppose, who would much rather be left alone, and not hunted up; women are such—*bored*—” with another drawl, dividing the word into two syllables, with a hitch in the middle so as to give it a reptile significance. “So are children! I always thought there should be some other way of growing men and women—old-fashioned idea! Creator behind the times, evidently old foggyish. I suppose we must put up with it though just as it stands, he has it his own way—*vi et armis*. Ah! Polydore, you there? Just step out, my good fellow, and borrow Judge Pierson's hand-basin for me to-day. I am short of dimes, or should inform myself with one of my own, and—aw—hunt up *the* towel, Polydore. I verily believe it has made unto itself flaxen wings and flown to the realm of departed towels; its inclinations were ever holy, thou knowest.”

Is it not lamentable that such a creature as this should be considered agreeable, or even tolerated by his fellow-men? And yet the nonsense of Lan Clinton was listened to by men of sense with delight, who could scarce abide the sound of each other's voices. But while

we are lending ear to his vagaries Connelly has found Howard, and Pardette has gone swiftly home to do her best in assuaging physical and mental wretchedness, such as neither leech nor minister could heal.

As she entered the darkened chamber of delirium, Gilbert, in his baby fashion, was asking for his little duck that had been crushed under the pump a week before, and feeding it with imaginary crumbs on the counterpane, while his brilliant eyes glared wildly and unconsciously around. Blanche lay quite still in a deep torpor which endured to the end; her eyelids and lips half apart, the last blackened and swollen so as to disfigure her almost beyond recognition. They were perishing with the terrible black tongue, the malady that had seized them both only a few days before, now ravaging San Francisco, and from which at that place and season so few recovered.

By the side of the bed knelt the mother, her elbows wedged in the mattress, her face supported by her hands, upheld rather, so that she could look, and look, and gloat, nor falter to the last, on those beloved faces; her hair pushed wildly back, her eyes so dilated that the pupils almost filled the iris, her nostrils drawn and tense, her lips dropping vacantly apart, her whole expression one of agonized idiocy. Lora crouched beside her, brought to her senses at last by the sight of this greater anguish, for until hope was gone there had been no manifestations of suffering on Hester's part, and she had moved actively and firmly about her children in the discharge of her duty, until she knew the truth, and with it her own despair.

She had dragged this unwilling truth from Doctor

Clarke, who had aided her throughout with all his care and skill; nor were these small. All that man could do he had done to save these children, for their mother's sake, a friend to whom he was singularly attached; and now he looked upon her condition with a pity he had never felt for the dying, for he was a believer in the great truths of Christianity, and thought it no insupportable hardship to see the mortal put on the immortal.

But this blighted vitality! This life in death! It was something very terrible to him who had witnessed many bereavements, but none like this before. He foreboded for her highly wrought brain and fine organization far more than had she been of a common order, the most fearful meed life has in store save blindness, *insanity*. He was wrong there! Such fine instruments recover their sweet tones after harsh touches, when those of a coarser make would remain jarred, jangled, and discordant forever.

Why prolong this agony? The children died that night, within a few hours of each other. The father, sobered by the blow, hung weeping dutifully above them. The servants were inconsolable, the mother—she alone—cold and tearless.

The old doctor was right after all, perhaps; her stony silence was so unnatural; there she sat smiling to herself, sometimes whispering their names, "Gilbert, Blanche, angels!" Only when the coffins were carried away there was a wild shriek, a fall, like Parasina's, and she knew no more for days. This mood passed into a sustained paroxysm of passionate despair; so wild, so dreadful, that it surpassed sympathy, and converted those who would fain have shared a grief such as they

could conceive of, or console, into mere passive spectators of a great tragedy, beyond their powers to embrace, or comprehend, or control.

What could Pardette and Lora do for a sorrow like this? What could Doctor Clarke? What could poor, selfish, commonplace, maudlin Mr. Howard achieve?

With an unnatural fierceness she drove them all from her presence, as the storm drives the leaves before it. She wanted to be left alone with the destroyer, she said; to see him face to face; to grapple with him in darkness and solitude; to dare him to do his worst.

"It was very dreadful, very blasphemous," Doctor Clarke thought, "on her part. It was charitable to think that she was mad; but if so, it was a most peculiar phase of madness. There was Shakespeare's Ophelia, though; and everybody knows *he* knew what he was writing about. How she talked, to be sure! one of the most modest and discreet girls in Denmark before she went crazy; and now this woman, this pattern of sobriety, submission, practical religion, gentle, uncomplaining dutifulness, to carry on in this outrageous style; to upbraid her Maker, almost as Job's wife advised him to do. It was something to make a man's hair stand on end, or (bathos!) write a paper about for the *London Lancet*."

"Will she be better soon, doctor?" asked poor, whimpering Mr. Howard, who felt as if a chimney had fallen down and battered him about the ears with its scattering brickbats, quite dazed and uncomfortable, and anxious to get back once more, out of the way of such trouble, to *the office*.

"Soon, if ever," answered the doctor, briefly.

"What do you apprehend?" he whined; and he drew

out his handkerchief, to be in readiness for any reply Doctor Clarke should make. "Tell me, doctor?"

"Death or madness, what else? the first preferable, of course," said the doctor, roughly. "Either," he thought to himself, "to a continuation of life with you."

And he wheeled off, disgusted. But his duty lay plain before him. Whether it was better for its own advantage to lose or gain this life was not his affair at all. His business lay in a nutshell; and this was to save it by any means possible; and he bent his whole powers to the undertaking. Sleep was what he wanted to produce: self-forgetfulness, relaxation of nerve and brain; a recuperating interval for mind and body both. That alone could arrest the fine-strung machine on its downward road to ruin. Food she would not, could not take, nor did he much care for this; reaction of stomach as well as brain would take place, he knew, if only those dilated eyes could be closed in the sweet refreshment of slumber; if only that breaking heart could rest unconscious with its bitter burden, a few hours under the serene shelter of the dome of sleep, what the palm tree in the desert is to the sun-dazed traveller.

Five days went past without one moment of such oblivion or relief, and now the sands of life were running low. The finely wrought springs of the brain had, it is true, so far stood the pressure well. Insanity seemed as far off now as in the beginning of her trial; despair seemed systematized if suicidal; but the body was giving way. The heart was rebelling against its overworked condition, the pulse going down despite such liquid stimulants as her stomach received in small portions as a part of her necessary treatment (the stricture of her throat

preventing and rejecting other aliment). Opiates, as far as he had dared to administer them (and he had already exceeded the common laws of physic on this head), had only exercised a baneful effect, by exciting and weakening his patient, both at once. Sleep was the desideratum, and this they had never even suggested to her system.

Under these circumstances he bethought him of a man, of whom he had heard more than once. A sort of ministering angel among the poorer classes, he seemed to be dealing out remedies to them without reward, which, probably through their own simple faith, acted like magic in many instances, but was chiefly notable for healing pain through the laying on of hands and magnetic passes, and was still esteemed a charlatan by most physicians.

Yet he was the graduate of an Italian college and had his certificates to prove this, a college famous for its occult knowledge in the art of medicine and the mystery that enveloped many of its proceedings. A sort of romance hung round this man, which was not lessened by his manner and bearing, or the proud humility with which he bore the mark of caste wherewith other medical men had chosen to brand him, for he never hesitated to come to their bidding when his peculiar services were required, and when the triumph of quackery was preferred to the loss of a patient by orthodox means.

Yet, for services so rendered, he asked and received no remuneration, and ignored the claims of the physician who had so summoned him as a patron from the time of his entrance into a sick-chamber, and as an acquaintance thereafter.

There was no consulting with this man, who acted out

his instincts and did not lose time in sophistic reasoning nor in argument. He saw, or thought he saw at a glance, what was needed, and to this need he ministered often with marvellous effect, so that between him and some of his poorer patients collusion had been alleged as the readiest means of accounting for what baffled investigation.

He lived modestly, yet respectably, without ostensible means, spoke several languages, had a low, sweet voice, and rare conversational powers. He was an enthusiast in art, though on this subject he rarely trusted himself to speak; was somewhat, not much, above the middle-sized, well made, a graceful man in all his movements, with hands of peculiar expressiveness and character, yet free from trick of gesture.

His eyes were clear, gray, and steadfast, well shadowed with dark brows and lashes; his face regular and calm, even to a defect, so as sometimes to look fixed and marble-like; his features were finely moulded, the mouth and chin especially; he had a clear colorless complexion which confirmed his statuesque appearance. His hair was chestnut in color, clustering in masses and reposing on his brow, yet strongly indicative of vitality; he wore no beard, and the whole individuality of his face was thus preserved. The pose of his head was singularly fine. His age might have been twenty-eight or thirty, at the time I write of, scarcely more. He was careful in his attire, yet plain. Such was Doctor Mordaunt.

Mr. Howard had given a ready assent to his being called in, as proposed by Doctor Clarke. "Anything for a cure," he said, "even if it be mumbo-jumbo. I wonder if it's the same man that sells love powders?"

"No, no," said Doctor Clarke, impatiently. "There is such a thing as magnetism in nature, we all know, and sometimes she piles on the agony rather high in one particular organization, and then the law of compensation begins, and this organization is compelled to throw off the superfluous fluid into some other receptacle deficient therein. This is the philosophy of the matter, I believe. This man is a sort of galvanic battery with a will and a purpose to direct electricity by, that is all. I employ him as I would do a machine. If he had a handle I would grind him. You see I have not this gift myself, and I have no right on that account to deny the existence of it in others, any more than an ear for music, or a taste for poetry, or a talent for cookery, or anything else I am deficient in. Why knitting a stocking, which every Dutchwoman can do, is just as mysterious to me as this man's magnetism. However, it may be all humbug after all; I have never witnessed any of his experiments, but a drowning wretch will catch at straws, and I confess I am at my wits' end about this case." A confession that none but a true man and good physician had dared to hazard.

That evening Doctor Mordaunt came. He found Hester Howard lying on her bed rigidly, as though her frame had been braced with iron, with dilated eyes and nostrils, clenched hands and teeth, and feet pointed downwards and tense, repressing, as it seemed, some fearful internal struggle, and with an expression of face, defiant, restless, fierce, wholly foreign from that signet which nature had impressed upon it.

He left her at midnight, after the patient and undivided efforts of many hours to overcome her condition,

in the hands of Doctor Clarke, breathing like an infant, softly, regularly, inaudibly, her pulse almost natural, her form relaxed, lying in the careless, graceful pose of profound slumber; her eyes closed, sealed almost, it might be said, the long, dark lashes sweeping closely down above the cheek; her hands, waxen and perfect, dropping on the coverlet like those of a weary child; her dark hair spread about her like a veil—in a sleep which simulated death, so profound was it.

“God giveth his beloved sleep!” was never more sublimely illustrated; and, perhaps, giveth he also to others of his beloved the power to occasion sleep. Who shall know? It is a tangled and unsettled question yet, that of the *Elect*. It means something, nevertheless. And we feel that men are not all gifted alike, nor born to walk equally, American constitution notwithstanding!

Emerson understands this better than any man, but he revolves in wheels and circles, like other planets, in his orbit. Wait long enough silently and he shall come to your side of the question, though he pass you by the next minute, and though you begin—Antipodes! Yet he is the only oracle of modern times that seems *inspired* to speak out what truth is in him, be it different each day.

“How long would you have her sleep, Doctor Clarke?” asked the young, exhausted man, who rose from his knees by the bedside, and reached out his hand eagerly for a draught of cold, clear water, draining it like one who had come from a long journey, not like a thirsty soul devoured with brandy flames, as Julius Howard had done on a memorable occasion not very long before.

“Twelve hours, if I could choose,” replied the physician; “but man, man, what are you to measure out

sleep by the clock?" and he laid both hands firmly on the young man's shoulders and shook him slightly. "What are you to say to the turbulent waves of a stormy soul like this, 'Peace, be still,' and stay with your will the work of death! Answer me, are you good or evil? and what powers do you serve?"

Tears streamed down Doctor Clarke's face as he spoke thus, for he recognized the greatness and the utility of the work that had been done, as something half divine; he that had talked so wisely of the animated galvanic machine a while ago.

Tears also, responsive tears, sprang to the eyes of the younger and slighter man, but came no farther. He was repaid for much suffering by this manly recognition of his gift as a great agent in morals as well as physics. "You are the first man of your order," he said, recovering himself, "that ever spoke such words to me. I thank you. I trust that I am doing *God's* work. I strive but do not know. I grope very blindly, if truth be told. My sight is veiled by instinct, which belongs not to the highest order of animal life, as physiologists tell us. I believe, however, I am neither worse nor better than most men; and now, good-night. I, too, need repose, but to-morrow, at noon, I hope to be here again: if not I shall cause her to awaken."

Greatly impressed and mystified, Doctor Clarke remained standing in the same position, in the middle of the floor, after Doctor Mordaunt had departed, for many minutes; then throwing himself in a deep chair, he prepared to trace the experiment to the end.

"Twelve hours of such slumber and she is saved," he murmured. "O God! if it be possible let the cup

pass from her! Old as I am, and many as are my children, I would give my whole worldly possessions freely to save that young life. I have put forth all my powers to such an end; all the skill, all the science of a lifetime, and *failed*. A strolling quack comes along—for so they call him in our profession—and puts us all to shame! He catches hold of some invisible cord, and jerks the whole nervous system into place again. He summons sleep—the most unbidable of all servants, especially where women are concerned—and it comes to him like a sycophant fawning at his feet.

“Now, this is sheer envy! Let me recognize my Maker through all his gifts, through all his instruments. If she sleeps until noon to-morrow, I shall bless Doctor Mordaunt to my dying day, and believe him to be one of the Lord’s anointed.”

And she did sleep until noon next day, when Doctor Mordaunt came again and she awoke. A strange face was bending over her, as she unclosed her eyes. Doctor Clarke came forward with his hands tightly clasped together; what if the brain had given way after all, and this stupor had but foreboded idiocy? It was a moment of intense anxiety to him.

“You know me, my dear madam,” he faltered forth. “I *think* you know me.”

She only smiled for all reply, but her clear and speaking eyes turned inquiringly to the face of Mordaunt.

“This gentleman is aiding me in my attention to you,” said Doctor Clarke, wonderfully relieved, and he laid his hand frankly on the young man’s shoulder. “We owe him much.”

“Thank him for me then,” she said, very faintly.

And now Lora came forward with the bowl of arrow-root kept in readiness for this occasion, and Hester partook of nutriment, so long a stranger to her lips, gratefully.

"It is very reviving," she murmured. "I have been very ill, I suppose. Stop, was it a dream, or *is* somebody dead? O God! my children!" and with a wild shriek she started up in bed, again the sport of agony, mercifully forgotten for a moment, and again the tranquillizing hands of the stranger performed their magical task, and brought calmness out of distraction. Thus for ten days she was kept alternately lulled and nourished, until nature had time to repair the ravages made by a sudden shock to the most subtle and delicate of all known machinery, the nervous system.

As he bent over her in those long patient watches, Doctor Mordaunt could not help drawing the contrast frequently between the girlish mother he had seen standing at her cottage-gate, elate with maternal felicity and pride, and the bruised and bereaved creature extended like a broken reed before him. He could not understand, strive as he might, the justice of the decree that tore the young shoots away so roughly from the parent tree, leaving it bleeding and bare. He only felt that the Maker and Father of all had his own inscrutable and just reasons for all his providences, and that *not* to believe this was weakness as well as wickedness and self-despair.

He could only pray that light might still be brought out of darkness, and that the Spirit of God should descend upon the bitter waters of this desolate heart and brood dove-like thereon for evermore.

I will not linger further on the details of this illness,

if such it might be called. At the end of a fortnight Eric Mordaunt was gone, explaining briefly, in a letter that he left for Doctor Clarke, that a summons from a dying relative called him suddenly away, and that he had no option but to take the first ship to New York just spreading its sails, or to wait many days for the steam-packet or chance of another. He bade Hester Howard no formal farewell, but when she awoke out of the magnetic sleep in which he had left her lying, she found a curious cameo ring on her finger with the name of "Eric" engraven on the inside. He had come in, Lora said, very hurriedly about dusk and just looked at his sleeping patient, and then putting this ring on one of her hands kissed both of them hastily and turned away. "She will awaken, as usual, at midnight, Lora," he said; "tell her to be strong in hope and place her trust in Him whose face is on that ring. I think that she is healed, as far as I can heal her malady; the rest is with God and her Saviour."

"I never can forget his words," said Lora, "they came out so clear and true-like. Does you know, Miss Hester, I tink dat man is a minister in disguisement—no doctor at all. Dey never talks dat feelin' way, and 'sides dat he don't give no drugs. I reckon it's de sperit of de Lord workin' in him dat does it all. Doctor Clarke looked like he was afeard of dat man."

"No, no, Lora, he loves and reveres him."

The ring was an exquisite onyx antique, on which was engraven that peculiar profile face of the Saviour, so sweet and so impassioned, copied from the celebrated emerald of Tiberius Cæsar, and thought by many to be the only authentic portrait. Hester had seen this out-

lined head once before, with its eager and inspired look, leaning forward (her mind suggested this) as if above a multitude, the long locks flowing behind over the drooping shoulders, the lips slightly parted as if words were even then breaking from between them, the deep eye fixed on space; had seen and craved a miniature painting on ivory of this head, in the possession of a friend, more than any other of the numerous and beautiful pictures that adorned his house, and now it had come to her as it were voluntarily, this much wished portraiture.

This little circumstance affected her deeply. It seemed almost a sign of divine recognition and pardon for rebellion. Yet she could not, candidly and with a sense of justice, feel that it drew her any nearer to God. Her mind refused to delude itself into the belief that she was fitted for religion, merely because she needed it as a stay and staff for her burden of woe, or a refuge from disappointment and desolation. Her prayers were merely cries of a despairing heart, sent up briefly, dumbly, reproachfully often; not the serene acknowledgment of God's wisdom and her own unworthiness. She felt that her deserts exceeded His benefits, that she was worthy of a better share of life's blessings than were accorded to her. That He was strong and she was weak, therefore at His mercy; but she could not love the hand that chastened her, could not take submission to her heart as a friend, and therefore she was still far away from the Almighty Father. Yet she never knew the darkest part of rebellious agony: she never doubted *His* existence; therein lay hope. Those that blow out the light are they alone that grope in the dark forever. While there is still a glimmering of flame to warm to life, the perfection

of faith may be not very distant. It is better then to consider God an oppressor, than to believe that there is *no* God.

Oh, being most to be compassionated of all his comprehensive hand hath fashioned, more isolated than the wretch to whom solitary confinement in the stone walls of a dungeon has been decreed as a lifelong punishment, more desolate than Niobe, poorer than the pauper who sits blind in the sun stretching forth an introverted palm for alms to the passer, weaker than the month-old baby that lies on its mother's lap in the sweet confidence of dependence, knowing not of the present and fearing not for the future, darkened and perverted Atheist, beyond all beings wearing human aspect should the heart of thy brother mortal yearn over thee most pityingly, for thine is the only unmitigated misfortune.

No, Hester Howard could never be this anomaly, a creature rejecting its Creator, whatever might betide. Yet she felt that his hand had withered her, even as the sun of August withers the tender grass. His glory, his power she disputed not, but through these her vitality had perished.

Thus was her spirit warped. She had no heart wherewith to praise him. She left this for his happy favored ones. Into the outside darkness he had cast her, and there she would remain.

In her childhood and early youth she had attended the Presbyterian church, and its stern teachings, so often repelled by her earnest spirit, if rightly understood, as unjust to the Father of all, placing him in the light of a partial and biased parent, recurred to her now as truths.

She was not one of the elect, that was plain, nor could

any prayer or effort of hers change the inscrutable edict of fate. It was all right, no doubt, that the Juggernaut car should crush those that lay in the road, even if they were too weak and helpless to crawl out of its way, some great necessity governing the whole; but as to special providence providing for the fall of the sparrow, and the hair of a man's head, that the Bible tells of, it was a sheer myth not worthy a child's attention.

General benevolence there was, to a certain point; design, too: no one could open their eyes without seeing that; but as to individual mercy, it was the supremest of mockeries. Away with it from that hour, when cry, and prayer, and broken-hearted contrition availed not to snatch her children from the jaws of the monster death.

"Insatiate archer, could not one suffice?"

CHAPTER V.

AN EXECUTION STAYED—TIME THE COMFORTER—FRIENDS
IN COUNSEL.

IT was early in December when Mrs. Carisbrook arrived in San Francisco, having been for some weeks in ignorance of Hester Howard's proceedings. An interval of silence had followed the last letter she had written on the part of her usually punctual correspondent, which had caused her no little uneasiness, and when, after leaving her son and his family at the hotel, and even taking a hasty breakfast with them to save trouble elsewhere, she drove up to the gate of Mr. Howard's

cottage, it was with considerable surprise and a movement of irrepressible irritation, that she witnessed the preparations for a speedy removal that were evidently going on. A furniture wagon in the street was already half filled with movables from the hall, to which more were being added by two stout porters, while a decently dressed man stood by superintending the transportation of the several articles of furniture, and their arrangement in the wagon, with a view to their greater safety. He came forward as Mrs. Carisbrook descended from the hack, on which she had brought some light luggage, which she ordered to be retained in its place until she should investigate matters. Her self-respect was somewhat touched that no communication of such intention should have been forwarded to her, an expected guest and lodger, already a few days behind the period appointed for her arrival, so that want of time could scarcely be alleged as an excuse for such a lack of courtesy or consideration.

"Is Mr. Howard going to remove?" she asked of the respectable-looking man, who, seeing the height of the carriage-step from the ground, politely assisted its substantial inmate to descend.

"Not that I know of, madam," he said, and hesitated. She saw that there was more to come.

"What, then, does this removal of furniture mean?" she asked, eagerly.

"It is to satisfy an execution," he replied, in a low voice. "Perhaps Mrs. Howard would rather not see visitors just now. We are going to take everything except her bedroom furniture. She is too poorly to spare that yet, her doctor says. That is the reason why the sheriff does not sell the effects at the house."

"Ill? a sheriff's sale?" were the hasty words she uttered. Then waiting to hear no more, she walked rapidly through the open gate to the front door, where she met Pardette. After a moment's conference with her, she came back promptly to the superintendent of the removal. "This is your first load, the girl says. Pray can you tell me at whose suit this execution is levied, and for what amount?"

He could not give her the desired information, but referred her to the sheriff.

"Will you go with me, then?" she asked, "to the sheriff's office, and give your men orders to proceed no further until our return, which will be as speedy as possible."

"He would do that with pleasure," he said, and in a few moments more they were on their way to seek the official in his den. Thirty minutes sufficed to settle the whole affair. It was an unsettled tailor's debt for five hundred dollars, the execution on account of which covered the whole amount of furniture in the household of Mr. Howard, which had cost originally about twice that sum. Mrs. Carisbrook paid the debt in gold, and became the possessor of the furniture, which she held as Mrs. Howard's trustee, for her sole use and benefit. "And now," she said, to herself, as she turned her face cottage-wards again, "the poor, wounded dove has rest for the sole of her feet at least, in her own quiet nest, where it is best for her to be, until, in His own good time, God mercifully restores her broken wings."

A strange light stole into her strong and deeply-lined face, the man thought, who sat opposite to her, without analyzing its source, as this satisfaction settled down

upon her heart. Without ever having seen her more than once or twice, he had felt very much for Mrs. Howard himself, as he remembered with what fresh and unfeigned delight she had selected and bought this furniture, now to be sacrificed, from his own cabinet repository, and how innocent and lovely she had appeared to him at that period. Doctor Clarke was his family physician as well as hers, and had, from motives of humanity, requested him to superintend the removal of the cabinet articles, so as to avoid all unnecessary noise, "or injury to the wood-work, or his patients" (strange category), and Mr. Moore had cheerfully undertaken the office. "I shan't charge her a cent for transportation, Doctor Clarke," he said. "Through God's providence, my children got well, hers died in the same skilful hands, and I will do what I can to comfort her for the sake of sympathy and compensation—God's great principle. My wife shall go to her if it will do any good—"

"Not a particle," interrupted Doctor Clarke. "Had your children died too, the case might have been different. Now the contrast between your wife's good and her evil fortune could only exasperate her grief. The furniture of her own chamber she *shall keep*, if I have to buy it in, but I can afford to do no more at this time; besides, it is for that dog's tailor's bill," he muttered between his set teeth. "If it were for any matter that had benefited *her*, the case might be different, and I would strain every nerve!"

Perhaps this slight circumstance may give a clue to the leading difference between the benevolence of man and woman. Mrs. Carisbrook ignored Julius Howard in her transaction, the result for Hester's benefit being her sole

object; Doctor Clarke could not overlook the idea of the future facilities he was giving or would give an accomplished swindler, if he paid his debts. Mr. Moore considered Mrs. Carisbrook a far greater woman than Queen Victoria from that hour that saw her the purchaser of Hester's effects. It was beautiful to see the care and quietness with which he caused every article to be reinstated in its former place, and the way in which he put aside his men about carrying Mrs. Carisbrook's light trunk to her chamber. "Mind your own business," he said, "I will attend to this. There is something in this trunk that requires to be carefully handled," muttering to himself—"God bless the woman, she is an angel." Then looking round the little room in which he deposited it, his artistic cabinet-making eye could not but admire its arrangements, and approve the luxurious air of its domestic upholstery; yet there were a few deficiencies, and he would make these up himself "for the sake of those two noble women." A little marble and rosewood candlestand he had in his warehouse, his own peculiar delight, upheld by a caryatid, for whom no one would give him his demanded price, and two oval-framed pictures, colored engravings from Aëry Scheffer's paintings of Night and Morning, that would just fill up the two recesses above the little sofas, and which no one in San Francisco had taste enough to purchase.

These he would send for at once and place and hang himself, just to show that a man *could* feel sympathy for misfortune and for generosity both; "but as to Howard," he ejaculated mentally (reader, forgive me for repeating this solecism, for I have always detested the Hibernianism, "mental ejaculations," but somehow it slipped out), "I

would not give him the rappings of my finger to save him from the penitentiary or Seal island. He's no fit mate for her anyway; a wicked, drunken spendthrift, who could and wouldn't make a living, a wretched drone in the hive, that deserves death."

Men find their level everywhere, and so, in spite of popular tradition to the contrary, do women, live they ever so obscurely. Little enough did poor Hester Howard think that her very misfortunes were raising her up friends, and still less, perhaps, in the frame of mind that possessed her then, would she have cared for it had she known the truth.

Before passing into the darkened chamber in which she still lay, though a month had elapsed from the time of her bereavement, Mrs. Carisbrook had another and this time lengthy conference with Pardette, whose truth and fidelity she was well convinced of, and from whom she learned all the details of Hester's late misfortunes.

Lora scarcely ever left the chamber of her mistress, whose very shadow she seemed to be in this time of tribulation, and who would receive nourishment or aid of any kind from no other hands. So far she had been shielded from the knowledge of the execution in her house, very carefully indeed, from respect for her sorrow, even by the usually inconsiderate Mr. Howard, who still hoped, however, to the last, Micawber like, that something would turn up to divert the exigency, as truly something had!

It is a mistaken but common idea that people absorbed with one great affliction feel minor inconveniences as much or even more than the happy do. In the lifetime of her children the loss of her household gods would have been a cruel blow to Hester Howard, to whom the

limits of her house were indeed the limits of her life, inexperienced as this was, and *so far* inexpansive, but now any cave would have done as well for her to hide in from light and the prying eyes of strangers as her own chamber, and superficialities of feeling such as mortification, or care for the opinion of others, could not have reached her at all, occupied as she was with one overwhelming reality. She was at wrestle with an angel of darkness as mighty as that which strove all night with Jacob in his tent, nor as yet did any streak of dawn appear to dispel its presence, or dispute its power; not even when Mrs. Carisbrook stood before her the very embodiment of compassion.

Mr. Howard usually stole in and out of his wife's chamber twice a day to inquire concerning her condition, impressed by this as he had never been before, and beyond his own comprehension or power to withstand, yet glad to find refuge, *out* of the shadow, in his old haunting-places. She received him kindly always, she had never done otherwise, even when he was harsh to her; but he brought no light to her eye, no balm to her heart, as a beloved husband had done (for what sting is there the hand of our heart's chosen cannot pluck away and heal?) and his coming and going, except for his own sake, were matters of indifference to her. Yet she would send word to Pardette not to forget to have his coffee strong and hot of mornings, and his eggs done to a turn, matters about which he was curiously particular, and to air his linen before he put it on, and see that his boots were cleaned, as if she felt the least interest in these things beyond some lingering sense of dutiful anticipation of his wants surviving all affection.

The death of her children did not increase her sympathy for him ; nay, rather weakened it. There was nothing to bind them together indissolubly now, never would be again, unless indeed that phantom of duty were all potent still, stripped as it was to the bare and shivering skeleton of all its accessories, respect, reliance, love; nor was hers one of those natures in which the last can survive the first.

Yet Mr. Howard had suffered more than appeared on the surface of his superficial nature. He missed his little children more than one might have supposed, and for a season was restrained in many of his outbreaking vices by the superstitious belief that got possession of him that their removal was a judgment on his sins.

The only comfort he felt was in the idea that he might, through their disappearance, once more repossess himself of the niche he flattered his amour propre that he had once occupied in his wife's affections.

When the Romans manumitted their slaves they struck them in the face. Mr. Howard had unconsciously followed this old Latin example. His slave was free, nor could he ever again impose the olden shackles upon her. What service he should thereafter receive must be placed to the account of the habits of dutiful allegiance outlasting emancipation.

It is really very provoking to have one's own especial property glide from under one's hand in that astonishing way! The power of inflicting punishment and controlling the weaker party is conferred on every husband at the altar, and it is an unheard-of thing for a victim to escape out of the very door by which authority enters. Just to think that deadening the sensibilities is as sure a

defence from suffering as absence itself; and that a man should be foolish enough to push matters so far as to do this is indeed a cause of regret to him that cannot be too seriously considered or lightly excused.

There are so many slighter and more ingenious modes of torture than absolute brutality that I am amazed born torturers should ever so far forget their vocation as to indulge in or descend to the latter course. It is cutting open the golden goose of despotism, and tyranny receives no more eggs from weakness. It is killing the bees for their honey.

Julius Howard had committed this great and unpardonable error, as he well knew; but he still hoped by systematic wheedling to establish his authority again, and to reign once more in unlimited power over his one legitimate slave, the only creature on the face of the earth that word or look of his had ever had power to govern, intimidate or subdue. He began at last to see how precious to him had been the regard and voluntary service of this ill-used Helot of his, and how comparatively empty were the mere outside attentions he received now from her compassionate and sorrowful hands, in comparison to much former spontaneous and unwearying solicitude. For Hester Howard had drawn very near to her husband in their expatriation, and turned to his sheltering arms for trust and affection, in a spirit that might have ripened into passionate regard had it been fostered, or even rightly entertained.

In those days he could not have been made to believe, not even had she told him so or sworn it on her Bible, that any act or series of acts of his could ever have so repelled from and hardened her feelings towards *him*, her rightful master.

His brain had been turned by her submissive devotion, and he crushed the head bowed before him into dust. Gradually it was lifted, but a new spirit possessed it, and we have seen the culmination of all this domestic discontent in his own violence, and the entire closing up of her affections, the drawing in as into its nautilus shell of all the feelers of the sensitive heart, the presentation of an insensible surface to every blow that his temper held in reserve thereafter. All this we have seen.

"And now comes old Carisbrook again," he muttered, on the evening of that noble dame's arrival, when on his return he found Hester for the first time sitting up in her large dimity-covered easy-chair with a little stand between her and her friend, on which that lady was administering the Chinese rites of tea-making and tea-taking, one of the formal oriental ceremonials belonging, all the world over, to feminine friendships. "Here she comes to bolster Hester up to rebellion again, just as I have patted her nicely down and smoothed the way to a perfect reconciliation. And yet what can I do? she redeemed my furniture and saved my credit (heaven save the mark!) and may do more. As it is, she will keep the house going, until I can look around and take a new start. (By-the-by I hope Hester will never hear about that execution: the old lady must promise me not to speak of it.) As to the office, I must give that up. It is deuced expensive to support all those fellows," (delusion this—the "fellows" paid each their quota of the rent and were going to give *him* up, because his part was not forthcoming; besides he lunched with them every day since the collapse of his pocket-book, and the failure of his credit at hotels, and this they found inconvenient).

"Will Connelly's airs are insufferable, and Lan Clinton is fast becoming a bore. As to Kirke, well he is the best of the lot, and I have a great mind to go to Salt Lake *with* him—I have that, if only to show Hester what is what;" and the very thought of ten legitimate victims instead of one made his small glassy blue eyes twinkle like beads. "She'd have to walk chalk there, or have her comb cut, and I've no doubt in less than five years they'd take me in as a prophet or ruling elder. Let her take on *then*, if she likes. But the fact is," after long consideration, "there's no one else that I'd care about being buckled to. Hang it all, there's something about that woman different from any other: I believe it is her deuced nonchalance that makes her so taking. I didn't care half as much about her when she loved me (query?) and was fond, as I do now, that she—well, it's only a way women have, give 'em rope and they hang themselves—that is, come back to their loyalty. Let her go. Plenty of time ahead; and she gets better-looking every day; and now that I have reformed, *I* shall improve in the same ratio. As it is, there are women half crazy about me (such as they are), and I believe if I was a single man to-morrow, unincumbered as I am now, I could marry an heiress—that is, anywhere out of this cursed hole, San Francisco."

On consultation with Pardette, Mrs. Carisbrook found that Hester's storeroom was empty, and she sent this worthy woman forth, armed with the staff of the housewife—gold—to replenish its empty cruses.

"Send up a basket of fruit, too, Pardette: we must tempt her to eat. I saw some very fine oranges and pineapples the other day while driving around, and per-

haps you can pick up a bunch of ripe bananas—you say she likes them—and guava jelly? Oh, by all means get some, anything, anything, my best of girls, to bring up her strength again and take that famished look out of her poor wistful eyes.”

“Ah! madame, nobody can do that but the good God. She hungers for her little children, that is all. Yet I do tink if she had such food as could be eaten with some joy, it would be better dan dis evermore dry bread and tea. I am sick of de very smell of dat nasty little weed what you call tea;” and she shrugged her expressive shoulders.

“Don’t say a word against tea, Pardette, as you value my good opinion. It is worth all the ‘cafe au lait’ in the world, you and your cow notwithstanding; but here comes Dr. Clarke. I haven’t time for another word” (going forward, as she saw him come in the gate, in her old vivacious way, so as to meet him at the front door, with extended hands).

“Come in, come in; I am so happy to see you, so glad to have you to myself too, for a little while; for Lora tells me the dear patient is asleep, and we shall have quite a chat about her in the dining-room before she rouses. She never sleeps long at a time, though, by night or day.”

“Ah, madam, could you have seen her in that magnetic sleep, it was the most wonderful thing! but the charm departed with its author, Doctor Mordaunt—to him we owe her life,” and he recounted those experiences that so deeply impressed him. “I wish we had him again,” sighing.

“What good could he do now, Doctor Clarke? She

could not be lulled forever: as well go into the grave at once as lead such a useless life as *that*. As to the nervous system, that strange compromise between soul and body, there *is* reaction there, is there not? sufficient, at least, to banish all fear as to a worse state of things than the present?"

"Yes, in one sense reaction, but yet what a hopeless, nerveless condition it leaves her in. Her apathy amounts to blankness: I don't think she knows night from day, or the taste of one kind of food from another, or discriminates much between faces, unless, indeed, it be Lora's, which is black, and which she prefers to others, merely from habit and association of ideas, I suppose. How did she receive you, madam?"

"Oh, very listlessly; I expected *that*. I was rather afraid she would not receive me at all, was prepared to be refused."

"What would you have done in such a case?" he asked, eagerly.

"Waited until she was ready."

"You do not believe in forcing nature, then, to make an effort. *I do!* I believe that if the house were to catch on fire it would do her good, although—" and he shook his head, "I am not the one for such experiments, for I was weekly anxious, a few days since, to shelter her from inconvenience that might have been of positive advantage to her. By-the-by, Moore told you of *that* probably, and he also told *me*—"

He hesitated, for he did not know how she might like the subject of her generosity broached by a stranger, and she responded as if she had not heard his last remark, looking at him with her strong, clear, steady eyes.

"How would *you* manage to arouse her to new interest, doctor? What would be your plan? Let us consult a little, even if I am not a brother, or rather, a sister physician. Reveal your system."

It is an unpoetical thing to tell, but the doctor scratched his head—it was his way when puzzled, one of the simple boyish ways he carried into old age along with his lank brown hair unstreaked by gray.

"Well, I would begin—begin—by—" he hesitated here, "dismissing Pardette," suddenly bolting out the last two words as if inspired by a new and brilliant idea, and looking at Mrs. Carisbrook triumphantly for her approval.

She smiled, bowed. "What next, doctor?" and he went on to elucidate his theory.

"I should place in her hand the broom, dusting-towel and dish-mop, send Lora to the kitchen, and let her do her own housework," he paused again.

"Après?" said Mrs. Carisbrook, provokingly, joining her thumbs and moving her foot a little impatiently.

"Well, then I should make her take a long walk every day and eat beefsteak, which she would soon acquire an appetite for under these circumstances," clearing his throat, as the ridiculousness of his own position began to dawn upon him finally. "Oh, Mrs. Carisbrook, you are quizzing me. I shall not hazard another opinion."

"Doctor," she said, laughing, "I knew exactly what you would say when you began. I never knew a man, especially a good, innocent, unsophisticated man like you, who did *not* think housework a cure-all for women, whereas it is the cause of as many weary, broken-spirited specimens of feminincinity (if such a coinage may be per-

mitted) as any other hardship known to womankind. There are persons so organized that it takes the spectacle of a hanging to give them a sensation, others so coarsely strung that they find amusement and diversion in hard work, and call house-cleaning pastime. Hester Howard is not of this mould. You cannot, with any propriety, put one of the 'horses of the sun' in a plough nag's harness, and expect him to do the same amount of drudgery, without chafing out his fiery heart. Now to return to our 'moutous.' Hester has always been a neat and careful housewife, but it lies not in her to labor after the fashion you advise, and the little elegancies of housekeeping, the care of china, the adjustment of ornaments, the fashioning of articles of taste or utility for bed or table, of which she was once so fond, it would be positive agony for her now to undertake, mockery even. It cannot be suggested at all, such occupation; and as to the other, she would take your well-meant advice as positive insult, I know she would, for it was once my own lot to be put through the same ordeal, and by a friend as kind and considerate as you are. But I was never so high-strung as Hester and bore it better than she could do. Just think, Doctor Clarke, how would that face of agony look, quivering over a shirt-bosom, and above an ironing table? Imagine those trembling lips and tearful eyes, straining and wistful, fixed on a cup and saucer or a dish-mop? It would be the refinement of cruelty in a case like hers, to demand such effort, it would indeed."

"But, my dear madam, she would *forget herself* in her occupations, which would, at the same time, give her exercise and brace her nerves, don't you see?"

"We have arrived at the point now, Doctor Clarke,

beyond which we cannot go. Those few words of yours, 'forget herself,' comprise the whole theory of her cure. But I, who have looked into this woman's secret heart with a woman's curious eyes, now say to you that it is *not* in such occupations she could forget herself or merge *her* peculiar grief. No common sorrow as you know, but a passion, such as women like her are only capable of. The Master knew what he was doing when he made Constance say, in her great maternal agony,

"'No, I defy all counsel, all redress,
But that which ends all counsel—true redress;
Death, death!'

Then again :

"'Thou art not wholly to belie me so;
I am not mad, I would to heaven I were,
For then 'tis like I should forget myself;
Oh, if I could, what grief should I forget!
Fare you well : had you such a loss as I,
I could *give better counsel than you do.*'

"Now, doctor, I will speak to you in the words of Randolph a little farther on—I, who believe in assisting, not opposing, nature in her wrestle with human agony, and bide my time patiently even to do this successfully.

"'Before the curing of a strong disease,
Even in the instant of repair and health,
The fit is strongest, evils that take leave,
On their departure, most of all show evil;
What have you lost by losing of this day?'

"Now answer me that, doctor, if you can? Why are you in such a hurry to bully nature?"

And Mrs. Carisbrook, who had, we suppose, the worst of the argument, being a woman, looked as triumphant as if she had beaten her adversary by means of the profoundest logical deductions.

"Upon my word, you have a great memory, madam, and your quotations are very apposite; but how happened *you* to take so strongly to Shakespeare?"

"Oh, I was an actress once upon a time, when I was younger, poorer, and better-looking than now."

"An actress! you, the most natural and unostentatious and practical of women!"

"And where, pray, lies the inconsistency?" The poor doctor could only color a little and stammer out, "Popular opinion, madam, popular opinion, not mine at all. I have very little acquaintance, I confess, with ladies of your profession."

"Truth to tell, there are few such in it, but occasionally you will find one, and the 'lady' is always a genuine article under all circumstances, therefore natural and unostentatious; besides Christianity teaches us the beauty of these things, apart from good-breeding, and I humbly strive to be a Christian."

"Madam," said the doctor, after a short pause, "I truly feel that my poor young patient is safe in your hands. Make her a Christian, madam, such a one as yourself, and all will be accomplished; but if you can't do this (and it is a difficult thing in her case and in her present frame of mind to attempt it just now, I've failed myself), do try with all your powers to make her *forget* her individuality now and then, even—even if it be—" said the doctor, making a strong effort to be magnanimous, "by going to the theatre."

Mrs. Carisbrook rang a peal of merriment. "Doctor, you are perfectly delightful!" she said, "the transparency of your prejudices and your noble efforts to overcome them alike entitle you to admiration."

He joined this time in her mirth, but repelled her accusations. "I am in earnest," he said, "and to show you that I am, I will go, too, whenever Mrs. Howard is able to accompany you. I, that have not entered a theatre for years."

"Very well, doctor, I shall hold you to your promise."

Lora came now to say that her mistress was awake and would see her friends.

She advanced to meet the doctor as he entered, and greeted him with her outstretched hand.

"See what my good fairy has been doing!" she said, with a faint smile, pointing to a basket of golden fruit that stood on a table. "Now you must both partake, if you want to give me pleasure. I know not what I have done to deserve such constant affection from two such hearts."

And she burst into tears more natural and gushing than those slow crystal drops which ordinarily fell one by one from her eyes, never weary of weeping since relaxation came to replace that fierce tension of agony that had caused her so long to writhe in serpent bonds until the deliverer came in the shape of Doctor Mordaunt.

It need not be said that her friends enjoyed, or seemed to enjoy, the fruit she barely tasted, yet on whose fine flavor she remarked; even this was much in her case. The next day flowers were brought, Mrs. Carisbrook having ascertained that these could be procured from a hot-house not very far off.

Some new books from England were waiting for her at the hotel. Among these was Lady Norton's then new novel of "Dunleath." There was some similarity between portions of the life of the heroine and her own which

made it deeply engrossing, after once the story had fastened on her attention, to Hester Howard, and read aloud in the clear, well-modulated voice of Mrs. Carisbrook, it soothed and interested her inexpressibly.

It is something to break up the continuance of self-consciousness under any circumstances, even be they pleasurable, but to snatch a link from the wearing chain of grief is indeed a mercy and a triumph.

Blessed are those who possess the gift of weaving fiction so as to simulate reality, and take the place of corroding thought and memory, even for a brief season of respite. These are to the mind and heart what magnetism is to the nervous tissue and its slave, the body; and all who work mercy through such agencies deserve alike to be considered in the light of emissaries of Divine Providence.

BOOK SECOND.

Ah, my tender babes,
My unborn flowers, new appearing sweets,
If yet your gentle souls fly in the air,
Hover about me with your airy wings,
And hear your mother's lamentation!—SHAKESPEARE.

Woman?—she is his slave. She has become
A thing I weep to speak, the child of scorn,
The outcast of a desolated home;
Channels upon her cheek by waves are worn
Of fear and wretchedness: full well ye know
What woman *is*, for none of woman born
Can chose but drain the bitter dregs of woe!
This need not be: let her arise,
Nor longer be forlorn.—REVOLT OF ISLAM.

BOOK SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

"TO BE OR NOT TO BE, THAT IS THE QUESTION"—THE
SERPENT GNAWS THE FILE—REACTION AND RESOLVE.

THE winter wore on wearily to Hester Howard, despite Mrs. Carisbrook's presence. She had ceased to talk of her sorrow or to indulge in the vanity of tears in the presence of others. She had caused to be put out of her sight, yet carefully preserved, every garment, every toy, every vestige and relic of her dead. She never entered the room in which they died (Mr. Howard's chamber now), nor turned her face towards that tangled garden, once her paradise.

There those twin graves were made by the deserted summer-house, so long the place of pastime of their inmates, so vaguely desolate now. Some day the mother might visit those calm sleeping-places and plant fresh flowers above them, bedewed by tears of sorrowful submission.

Not yet, not yet.

The time had not come when she could bear to look upon their beds of clay and think of the horror and corruption still at work beneath, while the vivid vision of life, and beauty, and sweetness flashed before her "mind's eye" of those seraphic children, so lately at her knee.

A strange sternness came to her soft face, as if her doom had waked her to defiance and incredulity of every mercy; yet her manner was coldly gentle, and at variance with the drawn tightness of her nostril, the compressed fixedness of her usually mobile lips, the settled pallor of her cheek where color had once obeyed emotion, the intense, far-off look of her dark blue dilating eyes, so lately luminous with feeling.

It was in February that she first consented, on Mrs. Carisbrook's account, to receive Mr. Morton and his wife, the last a plain but excellent woman—Mr. Morton himself, as is so often the case with English actors, an accomplished gentleman. The effort she made to conquer self in doing this reacted favorably upon her whole nature. The ice once broken, she found herself listening with interest to many of the experiences Mr. Morton recounted for her entertainment, chiefly theatrical, and once she caught herself saying,

"Really, all that must be very pleasant. I should like to see one good play myself."

In the next moment the abyss that lay between her and pleasure of all sort yawned again, and shivering with the nervous agony her own words had occasioned, she rose, and covering her face with her hands left the room abruptly.

"Was any pantomime ever more expressive?" said Mr. Morton, shaking his head sadly. "Poor thing! she is unconsciously a great actress, even in her utter self-engrossment, a study that might be profitable were it not so sad. Can nothing be done, my dear mother, to wean her from this all-engrossing grief?"

"Nothing that I can think of, Charles; a wound must

close before it can heal, and even then it is apt to leave an ugly scar, and be sensitive to the touch ever after. It is best, I think, *not* to pursue her too closely on this subject, nor even to appear to observe the suffering she strives very heroically of late to conceal."

"Now if she could be just forced away from this place, compelled to go out in the world and do battle for herself, it seems to me that would be the best remedy," he rejoined.

"Dr. Clarke, again!" murmured Mrs. Carisbrook, shaking her head; then suddenly looking up, "Charles," she said, "when you had typhoid fever don't you remember how it caused you to relapse to take a long drive one day, through injudicious advice, that overtaxed your strength? Yet, in your usual health, the exercise would have cost you scarce an effort and been decidedly beneficial. So it is with her; she is barely convalescent yet, not fully strong, and her own instincts can best direct her energies. The glare of the world, believe me, would kill that woman now."

Not convinced, but still deferentially and habitually yielding the point to his mother, manager Morton departed on his homeward way, with his fond little wife clinging to his arm, silently, as he went, revolving a social problem.

"Mary, I know you to be a woman of feeling," he said at last, "as deep and strong as Mrs. Howard's, yet you didn't 'take on' in this way when our beloved Bernard died—the flower of all our flock"—and he sighed deeply. "Why was this, dear wife? What constitutes the difference in the grief of you two good women?"

"Oh, I had *you*, Charles," and she drew his arm close

to her bosom as she spoke, stirred by the memory of her own sorrow to heave convulsively.

"Her husband is so unworthy, people say; she has no staff of comfort, no pillar of reliance, and but for your kind mother, I scarce know what would have become of her."

"Mother is a very noble woman," he remarked. "A perfect enthusiast, though! She magnifies her few thousand pounds through the medium of her own generous eyesight, and goes about doing queenly acts with her small means, which had better be reserved for a rainy day, or—"

"Our children, Charles," laughed back his wife. "Oh, mercenary husband! I see into your cupidity and condemn it. Let the dear woman have her pleasure in her own way; it is a noble one. I cannot think our children will be the losers by her generosity, for she is just, and will reserve the principal for them alone, believe me. Her interest she certainly has the right to dispense as it pleases her, and to whom she chooses."

"Mary, there is no one half so disinterested as you are on this side of paradise. I have yet to hear you utter a mean sentiment, or to know you do a mean act; but by-the-by, wife, you stammered dreadfully last night in your new role of Nerissa. I never saw you so little at home on the stage."

"Miss Meadows is such a poor Portia," she rejoined. "I forgot my own part in trying to give her the cue, which she needed all the time. Indeed I think her powers are very limited—a pretty face, that is all—and so entirely absorbed with her wish for admiration, natural, you know, Charles, to some girls, and no great harm, though fatal to the success of an actress, who should forget herself in her character."

"You are right," he observed. "Miss Meadows is not one of Shakespeare's women, nor capable of comprehending them. She would pass very well in vaudeville, or even melo-drama; but she murders the Master. Now if we only had—" he stopped, then added, "but that is not to be thought of now, if ever."

"I know what you mean," said his wife, "and what you or Mrs. Carisbrook could not hazard I will do. I will speak to her, Charles, about it and let you know the result. She will not be vexed with me, and the experiment is worth making."

"Your simplicity is so straightforward that I believe you could approach a queen on her throne, nor be repelled. Do as you please, Mary, and if you succeed in overcoming scruples, which amount only to squeamishness, since sooner or later in her condition an effort must be made for personal support of some kind, why I can only say it will be a good thing all round."

So leaving this worthy couple to jog arm in arm through the uneven and badly lighted streets of San Francisco (as it was *then*) on their way to the small tenement they had taken temporarily in preference to remaining longer at the crowded and comfortless hotel—a tenement literally overflowing with children, and in which there was no room for Mrs. Carisbrook—we will return to the domicile of the Howards, in which two ladies are sitting late over a smouldering fire, waiting the coming in for the night of an ill-regulated and unworthy host and husband, and deeply engaged in the meanwhile in conversation. Each ignorant of the colloquy of the other, a coincidence will be perceived between the suggestions of the two conversational couples which simply proves that the time had matured for action.

"Come out of myself?" said Hester, leaning her head on her hand and bending over the firebrands in an attitude of weary despondency. "Yes, Mrs. Carisbrook, that is what all who care for me counsel me to do; but I can only do at best like the poor snail who drags his burden behind him, even though he virtually creeps out of his shell, a greater slave to self than if he abode therein forever. I cannot say with Tennyson:

"'Tis better to have loved and lost,
Than never to have loved at all.'

I wish I could! I should be a better and braver woman. But I cannot, so there it ends. I ask only to *forget*.

"'Teach it me, if you can—forgetfulness.'

"Miss Landon's querulous appeal contains the true cry of the hopeless soul."

"Of the egotist, the epicurean rather, Hester Howard! Memory is God's mirror."

"I like the thought, but I cannot echo it. Listen! I have been thinking of late that there is but one talisman for grief like mine, and that is *gold*. Don't start. The bathos is terrific, but there is, nevertheless, common sense in the idea. Gold is the true elixir of life, dear friend, for such as I am. I must be able to change all of my surroundings, stand on a new platform, see life from a higher range, before I can merge my sorrow in the only possible way—in *novelty*. I must be rich enough to choose my life as, Cicero says, 'few are permitted to do save the gifted,' to traverse the face of the civilized globe, and view the mighty nations face to face: nor this alone—I must be able to see all their treasures of art, and hear the grand music of their masters, where alone it can

be fitly rendered. Thus only can I put aside individuality, the nightmare of existence, or *forget those graves*," and with averted face and introverted hand she pointed in the direction indicated by her words. "Now, friend, you have my sole alternative."

"An expensive one," said Mrs. Carisbrook, dryly.

"An impossible one as matters stand," said Hester. "A hasheesh vision—nothing more—soon over."

"I never suspected you before of worldliness, Hester, or overreaching ambition," said her friend.

"You opened the gateway, and now you would drive me back," was the reply of Hester, smiling faintly. "I was contented in my obscurity, in my ignorance, until you came. You educated me, when you permeated my being with Shakespeare, to unrest and endeavor. Come, I will tell you what I did this evening when I went so suddenly to my chamber. I sat down by my hearth, and made new resolutions. I resolved to throw off this incubus in the only way possible to me—the only way that promises a fulfilment of my dream. Then I rose and removed the veil from my mirror that has hung there so long, you know, and let down my massive hair and studied my own lineaments, one by one, as I might have done those of a stranger. 'They will answer the purpose,' I whispered to myself. 'They will help me to my end: that is all I want of *them*—expression, strength, slenderness, all combined, will suit the necessities of almost every situation in which I may be placed by my avocation.' You understand me by this time, Mrs. Carisbrook! I see that in your speaking eyes. I am resolved to offer my services to Mr. Morton, as an interpreter of Shakespeare, and I trust the rest may follow."

So the reader will see that by this coincidence of resolve good Mrs. Morton was anticipated though she never knew it.

"A noble resolution," said Mrs. Carisbrook, when she recovered from her surprise. "But what will Mr. Howard say? and my dear child, don't you know that without peculiar legal forms, as fast as you make this money he will demand, absorb, and squander it?"

"I will release my claims on his property; then we are quits."

"Do you mean to leave your husband in this new arrangement, my dear Hester?" asked Mrs. Carisbrook, abruptly, with a heightened color, ascribable to very conflicting emotions; for much as she pitied Hester, between whom and herself no direct confidence had existed on this subject, she still cherished the prestige of conjugal duty and devotion with unusual pertinacity; and yet she knew in this case of so many extenuating circumstances!

"Just as he pleases," said Hester, quietly. "There is one thing I am resolved on, however: that if I succeed, our purses are to be separate as our lives are now. This will be better for him as well as for me, I am certain. You cannot think," and she looked her friend full in the eyes seriously for one moment, "that I would hesitate to divide with him, who was *their* father, my last crust. All I ask is to feel secure, for both our sakes, against misfortune."

"Ah! I approve of that thoroughly; but you know, of course, that the intervention of a trustee can alone protect you against"—hesitating slightly—"your tyrant (Hester, the word will out); for in this respect your laws are like our own."

"Yes; I know. All that can be easily attended to,

though, when the *time* comes. I shall not fail in duty to myself, should I gain my end; nor yet to him."

"Poor child—poor child!" said Mrs. Carisbrook, bending eyes of honest compassion on the sad, sweet face before her. "I conceive now for the first time, it seems to me, the whole extent of your desolation, since out of it such character is developed."

"*Do you?*" said Hester, rising as she spoke, and standing with folded arms as rigid as a statue on the hearth-stone, while she gazed far down into the smouldering embers, as if she sought there to discover a dropped jewel. "Do you?" and a strange, sad smile flickered over her face, then died away into grayness, as she said, with lifted eyes and shaking head, "No, Mrs. Carisbrook, none but God has ever conceived of, or fathomed *my* desolation, and He—is pitiless."

"Hester, you must not judge your Creator; you must not *dare* to do this, even in the depths of your own heart, far less must you call a witness to such injustice."

"Let Him show then that He pities me," she pursued. "It is not yet too late: even human tyrants enrich the survivors of the victims they have slain when the storm of rage is over. We have such instances in history everywhere, you know. It would be as easy to Him to give me the gold I crave, as a cup of cold water to a beggar, or a sheaf of leaves to a marmot, or winter-nuts to a squirrel. I am no better in His eyes, perhaps, than these. He who is so universally benevolent, and yet so signally cruel, let Him repair His wrong."

"Conditions with your God, Hester Howard! Do you dare even to propose such a thing? Why this is impious, if not the mood of insanity itself. If He you

arraign so coolly were to strike you down paralyzed or dead before me for such presumption, it would not surprise me, and I should still believe He loved you, even in the chastisement."

"Let it come," said Hester, grimly. "I am not afraid, so that the blow bring unconsciousness with it; an end to grief, regret, monotony, disgrace. Death is a boon I have craved for some time; but this 'life in death' of mine is unendurable. God, who is so strong, so great, so inscrutable, who can strike or spare us when He will, build up or crush us to the earth by a sign, by a breath—God, who is so inexplicable to His poor, blind worms, as His teachers call us, ought to forgive the rebellion of His creatures who comprehend not His mysteries. I have been so bitterly chastised very recently," she added, coldly, "that I *do* think it probable the Juggernaut car has rolled on to crush other wretches, that lie as I did helpless in the road. I am not one of the elect, it seems, of Heaven. Let us see what endeavor can do for me on sordid earth. Who knows that I may not be yet one of the world's prosperous children, the elect of society? 'It is a kind of happiness,' Rochefoucauld says, 'to know to what extent we may be unhappy.' You see what sort of bliss remains for me." And again she laughed that low, wild, rippling laugh that chilled her friend's heart.

"This is very dreadful, Hester; yet I trust that when the stone is rolled away, an angel may be found sitting in the sepulchre."

Soon after this they parted for the night—Hester to sleep soundly, as one relieved of a burden, Mrs. Carisbrook to watch and pray, until the still small hours

should bring back unsteady footsteps seeking that lonely apartment, now assigned by his own request to the master of the house—the deserted nursery—once the abode of infancy and innocence.

CHAPTER II.

THE OPIATE OF OCCUPATION—SCORPION STINGS—HESTER'S DEBUT AND SUCCESS.

MR. HOWARD and Doctor Clarke, each in his own way, meeting for the first time on common ground, opposed Hester's resolution when made known to them; the first clamorously and with many vaunts of name and position not to be thus sullied, a suggestion at which Mrs. Carisbrook's eye flashed and lip curled, but which only provoked an amused smile on Hester's face; the last on the common principles of prestige and prejudice, of which he could not rid his mind.

Neither objection had the slightest weight with the person against whom it was levelled. She had made up her mind to give her own powers a fair trial and could not be either bullied or dissuaded from carrying out her experiment. Mrs. Carisbrook said nothing, one way or the other; indeed she began to feel a grave sense of responsibility, when she recalled former conversations, that must have biased Mrs. Howard's inclinations, and to regret that she had ever suggested aught that might increase the domestic discord of her hosts, or rather divide them further.

Manager Morton, to whom Hester made application before acquainting her husband with her resolution, was quite beside himself with delight. He had an honest love for his profession, and a wish to dignify it, which exceeded even personal interests; and his representations had finally their weight with Mr. Howard, who made a great merit of withdrawing his opposition, especially after he found that Hester looked upon it as a matter of moonshine, and that there was a prospect of substantial gain from the indulgence of her scheme.

One thing he insisted on, however, with all the pertinacity of pettiness, and all the airs of an injured sovereign. His name, the name of the great Maryland family from which he sprang, that old time-honored English name (to which a wit affixed so significant and disgraceful a rhyme in his well-remembered satire), should never come in contact with the stage.

Call herself what she would, Hester should not degrade his patronymic. Her own she could do as she pleased with.

"But I do not esteem it degradation, Mr. Howard," rejoined his wife. "I shall never do anything, I trust, to disgrace the name I bear or once bore."

"Resume your father's name then, if you think so, as your stage title. I shall test your sincerity by this proof, I think. You would do nothing to fix a stain on his name, I am well aware, but mine is a horse of another color."

"Then I will prove to you that I am candid," she said, coloring slightly. "My father's name was 'Lynne,' my mother's 'Myrtis:' now how do you think 'Myrtis Lynne' would sound?' 'Mrs. Myrtis Lynne.' It is

euphonious, I think, don't you? And I will keep 'Hester' as well as 'Howard' for home use alone."

This pleased, or rather mollified him.

The box was closely latticed which had been set aside for Mrs. Howard and his mother by manager Morton, as a point for study, more valuable than any course that lessons could impart to the novice in the histrionic art. It seemed to the observer, however, that divergence, rather than imitation, must be the mode intended for her adoption, so coarse appeared almost every portrayal of character compared to her ideal.

Honest in her intentions, she fixed her mind on what she saw and heard, and made the stage the centre for every thought, save when at some unexpected moment the old agony plucked at her heart-strings.

The faces of little children in the boxes sometimes riveted her attention, and again the resemblance to her own would flash irresistibly across her brain and almost madden her.

"O God, how like Gilbert!" Mrs. Carisbrook heard her exclaim one night in the midst of an impassioned scene, that she wished especially to study; and pale and trembling she threw herself back on her seat and burst into a passion of low, bitter sobbing. Again it was a little dark-eyed girl, the image of her lost darling, that taxed her heart to agony. It was from glimpses like these that her friend saw how agonizing her struggles were, and more than ever comprehended the necessity of shaped endeavor for a great loving soul beating itself to death against the bars of its cage, like an imprisoned bird, for want of room to spread its powerful wings.

It was settled that in June Hester Howard should ap-

pear in the part of Portia, that of Shylock being assigned to a temporary star, who shone benignly on this conjunction of the planets. Perhaps the play could not have been better chosen for the class of men who were to constitute its audience. Most of these were adventurers, endowed with enterprise and energy, whose fate was intimately bound up with traffic and commerce. Some of them had rich argosies at sea, laden with grain or gold dust, going and coming through the Golden Gate, and could sympathize to the full with Antonio in the merciless clutches of the Jew. Most of these men had left behind them sisters or sweethearts that kindly disposed them towards all fair women in that strange land, and lent a chivalric tinge to their ideas of female perfection.

Richly and becomingly attired in the velvet, and lace, and jewels, that Mrs. Carisbrook had reserved from her own stage wardrobe, and with the air of refinement that bespoke gentle birth and culture, Hester stood before an audience to which she was too indifferent for stage fright, and yet the approbation of which she craved at the same time, from the deep motive of necessity. In the first scene with Nerissa—one never very much to her taste—there was a latent coldness which made the heart of the manager sink within him, for he dreaded lest it might be an organic defect which would pervade all future rendition.

As she proceeded she warmed to her endeavor, and after a time, self, friends, sorrow, theatre, husband, audience, all passed out of sight as completely as though she had always dwelt in a distinct region. She was alone with Shakespeare. She was Portia, the cause she plead was a real one, and, as on her marriage day, out of cloud

and shadow came reality, she succeeded, and the allegiance she gave her art seemed a new marriage bond, so earnest, so faithful was it.

She had indeed "come out of herself at last," as she had long wished to do, and the joy of her new existence for a time buoyed up her spirits above the common ills that surrounded her.

It is a mistake to think that it requires scholarship to comprehend Shakespeare. The passions he represents—love, jealousy, hate, revenge—are common to mankind, and those who run may read, in spite of criticism. As for the actor, he must know temporary annihilation of self—transfiguration, so to speak—not less divine in its effects than that imagined and portrayed by mediæval painters.

"What a beautiful creature she is!" said Miss La Marque, the acknowledged belle of San Francisco, who sat in the front box, herself the "observed of all observers," dressed in white with crimson roses in her black hair, and a Cashmere shawl of the same rich color thrown lightly around her superb cream-colored shoulders.

"Ah, yes—quite beautiful, I decla-aw"—drawled Lan Clinton, to whom the remark had been addressed, merely because he chanced to be next to the speaker, for she was surrounded by a bevy of beaux, like a honeysuckle in full bloom by humming-birds. "Not my sty-le though, I-aw-oonfess. I prefaw something grander, deeper-chested; more-aw, in short, more," and he glanced significantly at the white and lovely neck of Miss La Marque, perhaps a thought too bare, but of marble perfectness and purity, "more-aw *unattainable*."

The lady involuntarily drew her shawl more closely

around her neck, and with an arch of her swan-like throat, and a curl of her lip, glanced proudly and rebukingly at her interlocutor, who saw that he had gone one step too far, but affected not to notice her change of manner.

"She is some New York adventuress, I suppose," he added, carelessly; "they are always fast creatures."

"You never were more mistaken in your life," said the low, steady voice of Will Connelly close to his ear, "this lady is the neglected wife of Jule Howard, who lost her children, you may remember, a year ago. Don't you recollect the visit of the French servant to the club-house? Don't you remember what trouble we had in hunting up the husband from some den of iniquity?"

"Confine yourself to the truth, my boy. It was you who played the part of good Samaritan, and poured oil and wine into the bleeding wounds caused by King Alcohol; not I, forsooth! I have nothing to do, aw-with domestic tragedies," and he settled his shirt collar superciliously.

"What are you murmuring about, Mr. Connelly?" asked Miss La Marque, suspiciously. She had no wish that on her account a quarrel should be fixed on one she scarcely deemed responsible, and felt quite equal to avenge her own social wrongs in her own way and at her own time.

"I was telling Mr. Clinton how entirely he was mistaken in his estimate of our 'Portia' of the night," frankly replied Will Connelly, who, well dressed, and clean shaven, and with the beaming expression the presence of Miss La Marque ever awakened in his countenance, looked a very different person from our old acquaintance of the club-house.

"Do tell me all about her; she is the loveliest creature I ever beheld in my life," said Miss La Marque, eagerly, clasping her snowy hands, which, as the narrative proceeded, gradually subsided into her lap, where they lay motionless, while every eloquent feature of the belle of San Francisco responded to the affecting story of a sister's sorrows. While Will Connelly was relating the simple story of Mrs. Howard's wrongs and self-abnegation, Lan Clinton was affectedly fanning himself with the magnificent Spanish fan, with its carved mother-of-pearl frame, and sniffing at the bouquet of Miss La Marque—articles of which he had taken cool possession before he hazarded his fatal "*coup d'état*."

"It will postpone the denouement a little while, that is all," he thought, complacently. "I have surprised her. I must give her time to recover. I thought she had more breadth of character by this time. Twenty-six years old, if a day, and her own mistress so long! I wonder if Will Connelly thinks he can enter the lists with me—a Clinton, one of the New York Clintons—*widiculous!*"

He, too, it will be remembered, was one of the "mutual insurance society," as they were derisively called in San Francisco—men living chiefly on their wits, and standing up to each other through thick and thin, welfare or adversity, shoulder to shoulder, until unanimity became power.

The Llama of Thibet was scarcely more invisible to the public eye than was Mrs. Myrtis Lynne, save on those occasions when she confronted it on the boards, and this, perhaps, unintentionally added to her attractions. Even Miss La Marque was disappointed in her

hope of seeing her in private by the polite but decided refusal to make any new acquaintances conveyed in Hester's note of reply to her own, proposing to set a time for an especial call.

This refusal manager Morton explained away as well as he was able, on the ground of the urgency of study and domestic occupation, and recent bereavement, and the spoiled young girl of society was generous enough to sympathize with these excuses.

We shall not see her again in the course of this narrative; this San Francisco maiden, in all her calm and magnificent beauty, and wilful power of undisputed bellehood. So it is as well to say at once that after Mr. Connelly had risen to the post of Alcalde, and proved himself worthy of her confidence, she bestowed upon him her statuesque hand and colossal fortune, and at his request assigned apartments in one of her houses to his "intimate enemy," Lan Clinton, and the accomplished colored disciple of the last-named worthy, Polydore. So that this privileged person shook in peace and luxury his cap and bells thereafter.

It was decided that after the season was over in San Francisco, Mrs. Myrtis Lynne should play her round of characters on the boards of the great Eastern cities, and thus test her own ability.

This plan was carried into effect with signal success both to herself and friends. Yet already her spirits flagged. The cup of disappointment was held to her lips, and the torch of hope that had burned so brightly at first was again reversed.

The occupation that Hester Howard had selected (as one ignorant of the necessities of her nature and position

might have supposed she had done) was not congenial to her taste or organization, and on near inspection lost much of its outward charm. She was after a season no longer lifted out of herself by its teachings, as she had hoped to continue to be, save when transfused before an audience into some ideal personation, for a few hours of effort; nor yet did it fill her powers as she had supposed it would do, for hers was a creative mind even more than a receptive or imitative one.

Deliberately as she may have seemed to have chosen it, this vocation had been forced on her acceptance by circumstances more or less evident to the reader, and altogether apart from her native character. Yet, it appears difficult, even from what motives are apparent, to reconcile to a stranger's mind this new life with the old, this quick decision with the accustomed dreamy submission, and the habit of entire dependence and domestic reserve, which had been her early characteristics.

Be this as it may, it is no less certain that after a time came a miserable reaction, when, but for the prestige of the past, her vocation might have failed her utterly; and yet, as the illusions of her art faded one by one before her like the colors of the dying dolphin, erst so splendid in his native seas, leaving it at last cold, and gray, and dead, the creative power that lay deep within her nature dawned into being, and began to put forth and unfold its wings.

The stage became almost insupportable to her now, yet none the less did she devote to it all of her energies, mechanical as seemed her art, compared to those of the originators, the poet, the novelist, the painter.

She had never cared for individual or personal ad-

miration, and that of the public already satiated and disgusted her; nor did the gold she had craved for purposes of self-alienation flow in upon her in such pactolian streams as had been promised or prophesied by her own imagination.

Enough for reasonable wants she had, but whatever means she had been able to command or save beyond her necessities and those of Mr. Howard (luxurious as were his requisitions) had been strictly devoted to the payment of his creditors. They were now out of debt, and in a certain degree her husband's respectability had been restored; yet, through the long vista of years before her, she could see no other mode of gaining her livelihood and his than to pursue the path she trod with such fair success and such unwilling feet.

Yet, even as she felt this strong and sick revulsion against the art she had adopted, did the true Undine of her soul begin to break the seal that closed the well of revivifying water, preparatory to her ascension and revelation.

From the chaos of that old clasped book of shreds and patches, that fragmentary record of hopes, dreams, disappointments, aspirations, joy, and grief, that witness-box of her spirit, came forth a majestic presence, evoked perhaps by the mighty wand of Shakespeare's self (and who would not be proud to owe inspiration to such a source?) destined to walk with her through life, and lift her above all dark and evil places, and set her feet where the amaranth gardens grow—a spirit unseen and unsuspected by common eyes.

Genius was awakened.

CHAPTER III.

"ALL IS VANITY," SAITH THE PREACHER—A MISTAKEN VOCATION—ALNASCHAR DREAMS—GOLDEN REALITIES.

TWO years of histrionic success and of heart-failure passed over the head of Hester Howard ; and again, after a long round of travel, she found herself domiciliated in the small cottage in San Francisco, in which city she was about again to fulfil an engagement with manager Morton, still the theatrical lessee.

Mrs. Carisbrook had returned to England to finally arrange her affairs, preparatory to taking up her abode with her son ; and there were none to welcome her return to her ancient home, save the faithful Pardette, and the mute presence of two graves.

These had been well cared for by the sturdy Alsatian ; and the violets and snow-drops were as fresh upon them now, as when first planted beneath the willows by a mother's parting hand.

But Hester felt the old agony surge back too vividly as she beheld them, and trod the low chambers, once made bowers of delight to her by the twinkling feet and merry laughter of her babes, now so dreary, so unspeakably empty. There had been some thought of repairing the fences and adding to the house, as a permanent residence, or rather, a perching place, for one who, like a migratory bird, must be ever ready to flit away on the wind, whither her vocation pointed.

A home was indeed desirable to one so lonely ; yet this idea was abandoned, somewhat to the disappointment

of Mr. Howard, who, now that the children were no more, was, by the law, their residuary legatee, and very willing to see his property rehabilitated at the expense of his wife's exertions.

A dull dislike had grown up in his heart towards her, now that she was so entirely independent of him, both in purse and feeling, and that he felt constrained to treat her with more respect than in old days, when, for the sake of her very helplessness, he had loved her well after his strange fashion.

Virtually separated as they were, and sad and cold as she felt her lot to be, she did not suspect this truth, and strangely enough clung to him with the fondness of habit strengthened each day, clung to him all the more tenaciously as the real solitude of her situation became apparent, the desolation growing out of an utter want of congeniality with all of her surroundings.

He could not enter into the temple of her life, had never done so, even when that sanctuary was a simpler place and far easier of access; but he could stand in the vestibule at least, and guard the door from the approach of other intruders, these even more unwelcome than himself. She felt the value of this shield, this barrier between herself and the world, frail as it seemed to be in other eyes, as an immeasurable advantage, though her inmost soul leaned away from his, and her nunlike sanctity shuddered at his thinly veiled profligacy.

Her native shyness, her peculiar reserve and modesty of nature had, no doubt, much to do with this necessitated allegiance, which went no further than the public saw, and yet which was not hypocrisy. Indifferent as she felt to the presence of masses, she could not so read-

ily reconcile herself to that of individuals, and gently cold, respected rather than beloved, she passed before her brethren of the stage.

Her heart was neither with them nor their vocation. This they instinctively felt. She was among them, but not of them. She belonged to Shakespeare, not the company she happened to be thrown with, and there her allegiance ended.

Her husband's was literally the only arm she ever leaned on. She exacted from him as the price of his luxury and extravagance nothing more than the safeguard of his presence at rehearsals, and even behind the scenes. This she insisted upon in a way that he declared to be "d—d arbitrary," and yet he yielded, for were not his cigars and champagne at stake?—his patent leather boots and French kid gloves, and well-filled pocket book?

Young girls seeing her pass, those of her class I mean, would timidly stretch out their hands to meet her touch, and feel thereby strengthened and sanctified in the way of virtue and noble endeavor.

Example is weightier far than precept, and she bore about her the talisman of purity and power that awed bold men and women, who had met rebuke or contempt with their own weapons.

In San Francisco, as elsewhere, she was little known beyond the stage, and the identity of "Mrs. Myrtis Lynne" and the obscure "Mrs. Julius Howard," save by the few, was forgotten, or unsuspected. I mention this that the mystification that grew out of it in several instances may not seem wholly the work of design, nor yet improbable to the mind that follows mine, to the eyes that trace these pages to the end.

What then had she gained by this so far unrequited effort to battle fate and rise above circumstances, save bread and discontent? This much at least: the doors of her intellect had been set ajar; her mental vision had been touched, so to speak, and she saw the universe. Nay, more, much power over self, much equipoise of mind and manner both; much confidence in her own ability to make her way, and earn her right to live and breathe and possess her part of the world's goods, had come to Hester in those two brief years, so long to her, because so full of change, of effort, and yet of monotonous endeavor. She was one of God's workers now, and loathe her task as she might, she was not blind to the dignity of her position.

It was now autumn; in the following June her engagement with manager Morton would terminate. She would not renew it, nor was she yet able to go abroad in pursuit of that theoretical happiness she promised herself, from self-oblivion. She must hibernate yet a while, live on her own nature, and it was well for her that the discovery of the creative vein that threaded it, and promised, if pursued, to lay bare still unrevealed mines of treasure, hiding away far within the dim kingdom of her brain, should have been made just at the time when all things palled upon her, and when the vocation she had chosen had begun to seem such a gingerbread mockery to her morbid turn of melancholy.

To remain in San Francisco, the scene of her own grief, and her husband's follies and failures, was simply torture, not to be voluntarily endured. Yet she was one of those women to whom a home is an absolute necessity, be it small or great. She needed the conservatism of

solitary possession, the absolute protection against intrusion, the deep quiet, the freedom, the repose, the individualism of her own domicile, the permanence of ownership. She could no more have contented herself in a hotel than a lion could have done in a flower garden. A home there must be, yet where should she go in search of one?

Outward forces governed her conclusions, as shall be seen, unless, indeed, blind chance or fate did all, as many are ready to believe, rather than tempt the truth, or acknowledge in all things the dispensing hand of the Infinite, the Allwise.

One evening in September, just three years after that memorable occasion when outrage had confirmed repulsion, a buggy stopped before the cottage of the Howards, driven by a gentlemanly-looking person, who, flinging the reins carelessly to the mulatto driver ensconced beside him, and adding a few hasty directions to those already given as to the treatment of his foaming steed, dismounted hastily and found himself by reason of the open door at once in the presence of the proprietors of the cottage.

They were sitting at a small oval tea-table in full view from the front door, with a feeling of security from intrusion that their habits of life and the secluded street they lived on both fully justified, when their unknown and unexpected guest entered unannounced and stood before them. His quick eye embraced a scene of what seemed to him the most perfect domestic concord and unsophisticated simplicity of life that could well be imagined, and his ready mind suggested the instantaneous conclusion that it would not be difficult to deal with people like these; contented, quiet, unaccustomed probably to any

but limited affairs, and easily satisfied with very moderate gains.

He introduced himself as "Mr. Mulgrave," an agent long employed by the executors of Judge Lynne as superintendent of the now valuable lands belonging to his estate, the greater part of which had fallen to the share of Mrs. Hester Howard, in the division of her father's property—lands which but for his foresight and even advances from his own purse might long since have been forfeited for taxes. Mr. Howard had never responded to any call of this sort, and had been too difficult of access to seek until now, when the great and sudden advance of this property made a long journey advisable, even at the expense of its proprietors, and at considerable personal inconvenience to the superintendent himself.

"What do you suppose the whole estate to be worth—my wife's, I mean?" asked Mr. Howard, in an agitated manner, after listening to the communications of the agent.

"It is very difficult to estimate its precise value," was the equivocal answer. "At present, if sold, I should say one hundred thousand dollars would cover the whole amount of land; but if kept a few years—"

An exclamation, almost a cry, from Mr. Howard, testified to his delighted surprise, and interrupted the stranger; but Hester was silent, though also deeply moved by many conflicting emotions, among which her own daring words bore part.

"He could give it to me if he would, as easily as a cup of cold water." And now this tide of wealth was setting in from an unexpected quarter in startling verifi-

cation of her own desires. The coincidence appalled her.

She leaned her elbow on the table heavily, her head supported by her hand, and for a moment she was blind with emotion. In another the instinct of good-breeding showed her how she had been wanting to her guest, who was still standing by the table (from which Mr. Howard had started to his feet in his sudden surprise) and still holding his hat, riding-whip and gloves in one hand, while he wiped his heated brow with the white handkerchief he grasped in the other. It was a still and sultry evening, be it mentioned.

"Sit down, Mr. Mulgrave," she said, "and drink tea with us," and she rose and drew a chair for him herself, to the table. "Lora, a glass of iced water for this gentleman. There are biscuits and cold bread and butter near you, and tongue, and here is cottage cheese; we live very frugally, you see, but I will not apologize."

She smiled, and he thought he had never seen so enchanting a face, heard such a sweet voice before, or come under the influence of such a gracious manner, and the tea she poured for him had a smack of nectar about it to his lips.

He had seen little of ladies' society, though a man of good family and education. In the obscure western settlement, in which he passed most of his time, women were angular and ungracious concerns, with nasal voices and didactic manners, and Mrs. Howard struck him as a being of a different mould, so soft, so graceful, so refined, so supple, so strangely, serenely beautiful, with such a mixture of affability and reserve in her manner, that he could scarcely determine which predominated or imparted the peculiar charm to this southern woman.

There are men who will not be wise, who voluntarily court destruction and play the part of candle-moth from choice or vocation, and such as these have no right to complain if their wings are singed in the flame they blindly rush upon.

Of this order was Mr. Mulgrave. Hard, cold, avaricious as he was, he could not resist the attraction now set before him, and as indifferently set as a wax-candle is placed before a bewildered beetle. From this moment Mrs. Howard governed his destiny, unconscious of such power as is the sunbeam of the motes that dance in its rayed influence.

The man was suddenly struck with love!

He tarried that night beneath the humble roof of Julius Howard, and before retiring made his true purpose known, which shed a ray of light on his apparent disinterestedness, and somewhat abated Mrs. Howard's belief in the ardor of his zeal. He had come on the part of a corporation to buy a ten-acre lot she held in the very heart of the town of Q—— (let me not forget to state, that by the laws of the State in which this property lay, it was hers in fee simple) on which a court-house was to be built, and for which the sum of twelve thousand dollars in gold was offered. He was struck with the eager expression of Mr. Howard's face as this sum was mentioned, and with the calm indifference of his wife's countenance as she raised her clear eyes to his and simply asked,

"Is it *worth* no more?"

"She is so happy," he thought, "she does not care for wealth!"

Indeed, had she been accustomed to the daily handling

of thousands, she could not have seemed more collected, but the diagnosis was wrong.

He hesitated a moment, then answered her frankly, as he had not meant to do when she first asked the question, but something whispered to him that this woman was clairvoyante, and that her esteem was worth both winning and preserving beyond gold.

So he said truthfully,

"It is worth more, perhaps, and in a few years will be immensely valuable, no doubt. Yet this is all that is offered now, exclusive of my commission, and as much as can be obtained just now, and if you need ready money, perhaps you had better sell it and reserve your suburban lots, which, before very long, will find themselves swallowed up in this rapidly increasing city, and become in turn extremely valuable."

"You have come a long way to oblige us," she said; "we will not disoblige you: take the lot at the price you have named, and make your own commission, Mr. Mulgrave."

She laughed as the thought went through her mind, "We will put a gold chain around the neck of our carrier pigeon at once. This is poetical justice at least."

But he, basking in the smile whose source he understood not, felt for the first time in his life indifferent to mere sordid gain, and vowed in his speculating heart of hearts to unsheathe his knightly pen and pencil in this lady's behalf and for her best interests, were it against his own brother, thenceforth forevermore! Something told him instinctively, before many hours, that this fine woman was mismated; why was she happy then, and careless of gain? He was a stranger in San Francisco,

had never heard Mr. Howard's name before, save at home, as the husband of Judge Lynne's daughter; but men like Mulgrave, quick, watchful, impressionable, learn to read character at a glance, and that night he understood the man he had to deal with almost as well as he did later.

"To whom shall I pay this money?" he asked in a low voice of Mrs. Howard, before he retired to his chamber, the room once sacred to Mrs. Carisbrook.

"To *me*: it is mine, you know; and in my husband's presence," she replied, without a shade of embarrassment. "This will be satisfactory to us both, will it not, Mr. Howard?" and she explained the arrangement to him in a few words, pursuing him to the door to do so, and laying her hand on his arm as she spoke, looking steadily into his face. Mr. Mulgrave saw or fancied that he saw him quiver with rage beneath her grasp, while a malignant expression distorted his florid features; but he made no objection, and accordingly on the following morning certain checks were given into Mrs. Howard's own hands, made payable to her in gold, in the bank of San Francisco, and a deed for the lot executed in return in the town of Q——, together with a power of attorney entitling Mr. Basil Mulgrave to dispose of lots and lands for the benefit of Mrs. Hester Howard, to the amount of thirty thousand dollars, should he see fit to do so, in the course of the following year, with directions to remit the proceeds to that lady.

Mr. Mulgrave drove his blooded horse to Sacramento, but called again as he passed through San Francisco a few weeks later, and finding letters from the town of Q——, where he resided, awaiting him at that point,

thought he could say to Mrs. Howard confidentially, that he would have no difficulty in disposing of the quantity of land needful to supply the thirty thousand dollars she wished to invest in stocks, without much detriment to her estate, since he could cull carefully, here and there, so as to advance the price of the remainder by bringing improvements in its midst.

This intelligence was highly satisfactory to Hester Howard ; it promised immediate subsistence, if not more, and beyond lay a vista of fortune, for which she could still afford to wait five, nay, ten years, if necessary ; for, as I have said, she was one of those beings where development is slow and sure, and at twenty-four she was still growing into new beauty and intelligence, and she knew herself well enough to believe that at thirty, or thirty-five even, she would, if health were spared to her, be even better fitted to enjoy and adorn a wider sphere of life than at that hour. She could afford, in the interval, to live without exertion beyond that required for creative art.

Her resolution was taken at once on that subject ; she would give up the stage, after her engagement was completed with Mr. Morton, and surrender herself to the indulgence of her ideal. In a land of art, away from all painful associations, where cold never came to chill the frame, nor the voice of public opinion, colder still than the icy blast, penetrated the calm indulgence of individualism, she would forget the past, and lapped in music, painting, sculpture, flowers, refined society, put away the mantling cup of memory from her lips. This she would do when the golden showers fell over her in the end.

Vain dreamer !

What phrases are these, that any but a demi-god should

utter them? Yet they made themselves audible in the heart of that once lowly and now presumptuous mortal. This struggling and enslaved woman, who, because she flung forth her thoughts at times, as a falconer flings forth his hawk to bring down a quarry, did not remember that the hood, the chain, the jess still remained as badges of her bondage.

Life is a very Midas, in that it cannot subsist on gold alone, nor feed its famished heart on mere externals; neither does the unshared repast of intellect suffice the famishing lips of true humanity, above all of fervent womanhood. There are social monsters who batten on such food, they tell us—always masculine—and it might seem to such, that youth, health, fame, and gold might suffice even for a woman's happiness; but until the end of time there shall not be found one of these, however gifted, worthy of the name, at least, of that sex chosen to bring into being a God to save the world, to whom existence shall not prove valueless without affection.

CHAPTER IV.

THE "GOLDEN GATE" CLOSES ON HESTER HOWARD FOREVER—DESERTION AND DELINQUENCY—A DILEMMA.

A LETTER from Lynnesborough, sealed with black, was laid before Mrs. Howard, as she sat engaged in the mental wrestle that this question of a new location had recently excited in her bosom. Mr. Howard had declared that he would either sell at once, or improve the

property they owned in San Francisco and live upon it, and now that her children were gone, she did not care to oppose him, although to her either alternative was painful.

Sanctified by her graves, it seemed desecration to part with her home, and yet to live near them was madness. The house suffocated her, not because it was small and lowly, but that it seemed so filled with the atmosphere of sorrow. Had she never left it, the association it bore with her grief might have come to seem consolatory and sacred, but having breathed freer elsewhere, she could not brook its oppressive mephitic influence. She must leave it, she felt, or die, and yet how part with the place where they had lived and perished, the children of her soul, and where still their mouldering forms lay beneath sweet garden mounds of grass and flowers?

It seemed that Providence had taken pity on her struggle and sent a messenger to decide her intentions for her in this letter, which simply announced to her that her step-mother, who had long ceased to correspond with her, was dead, and that Briarheath was for sale.

Her determination was taken instantly to purchase this property, and remove to it, now that her sisters were free to value her for her own merits, and the obstacle that had so long interposed between their hearts and hers was removed by the death of Mrs. Lynne.

Of course Mr. Howard should be consulted, but she never doubted his consent on certain conditions, and she looked forward to a better state of things for him, when he should be removed from the temptations of their city life, and those the association of actors presented, and find himself looked up to, and considered as the master of Briarheath, in a safe and orderly community.

Her heart leaped up in her breast, as it had not done for years, at the thought of renewing her family ties—for the bread of affection was what she hungered for—and rehabilitating her father's house; in the building of which, and the cultivation of the grounds about it, she knew that he had found such delight, taken such innocent pride.

It was like rearing a monument to his memory to do this (far better than that granite block in the old churchyard); besides, it would oblige them all so much—all that she cared to oblige—if she would buy out the shares of her brothers and sisters, poor and needy as she knew them to be, and pay them promptly.

The house, with its seventy acres of land, partly woodland, was offered to her—after deducting her own share of the estate—for precisely the sum Mr. Mulgrave had placed in her power, in two annual payments.

It would require as much more she knew to reinstate and furnish it worthily, and as became her condition; but she hoped to be able to persuade her husband to do this with the results of the sale of his cottage and acre and a half in San Francisco lots, now rapidly growing into value; and then they would carry their dead with them to the old family burying-ground, in Lynnesborough, where some day they too should sleep beside them, and their refuge, in the interval, would be found for life in the dear old homestead.

In the meantime Mr. Howard was maturing a plan of his own, which he saw fit to announce to his wife on his return home late that evening; thus anticipating the communication she was about to make to him, and the scheme to which she so fondly hoped to secure his consent.

"So you got a letter from Sutton to-day! I know his hand, and saw the Lynnesborough post-mark as I handed it to Cornelius. By-the-by I wonder if that rascal groomed my horse—pest on his Irish soul—before he went off to his night-quarters, or cleaned my new boots?"

"Never mind that now, dear Julius; sit still a little while and listen to me. In the first place I want to tell you that my step-mother is dead."

"So much the better for her family, I imagine, and cause of rejoicing to you. I hope you will leave off your mourning now, instead of deepening it, in honor of the event."

"Let me wear it a little while longer, Julius; it suits me best. It is as much as I can do to give thought to my stage costume. When that necessity is over—"

"Over!" he interrupted, harshly. "What are you thinking about? You will take another engagement with Morton, I suppose, when this is ended? Don't let a little newly-acquired property turn your head and spoil you for your vocation. Acting is your only means of income yet a while, and to tell you the truth, I have made up my mind to take a little European tour next spring, and—and—I shall want means."

"I know not how you can obtain them, Mr. Howard," Hester said coldly, suddenly repressed, "certainly not through me. I might as well announce to you at once my determination. I intend to leave the stage after fulfilling my pending engagement in San Francisco."

"Leave the stage! You are absolutely crazy!"

"You said so when I went on it," and she smiled sadly.

"But who could predict your success? Can't you make a distinction? What right have you to throw away *our* livelihood in this reckless fashion?"

And Mr. Howard rose in all the dignity of offended manhood, and paced the room, striding angrily.

"*Our* livelihood shall not suffer, Julius; come here and let me tell you of my plan—one that will insure occupation and respectability to both of us, and give us a refuge from all the storms of life. We can afford to wait—we are not old, you know—for that golden future prophesied by Mr. Mulgrave; and when it is realized I will go *with* you to Europe, an enjoyment I have long looked forward to, and felt willing to toil for, and serve for, seven years, if needs be—that Rachel of my hope! Rest assured I shall not be idle, my husband, and that I shall find other employment more congenial to me than the stage; as you may also, if you will interest yourself in reclaiming the bramble-grown land of Briarheath, once a Paradise."

"Briarheath and Paradise! why what on earth are you driving at? One of old Sutton's vagaries, I suppose, for the good of his family. He was always contriving plans for other folks at school, to redound to his own advantage. I remember him of old."

"I did not know you knew him at all. Well, here is his letter; read it, dear Julius, and read it dispassionately. I have set my heart on this change—this delightful seclusion—and the renewal of old ties. I yearn to know, to clasp my sisters."

"Sisters, indeed! Why you have not had a line from home for three years. They did not even write to you when your children died, or when Reuben Lynne was

drowned, or when Sophy Wheeler married Sutton. If it had not have been for the Lynnesborough *Examiner* that Jack Dillard sent me regularly, as long as he edited it, I should never have known a word of the matter, nor would you ; and now they have the unparalleled impudence—but let me see the letter ;” and he snatched it, angrily and rudely, and read it, standing near the lamp.

“An enchanting description, truly,” he said, dashing it down contemptuously, with a derisive smile, while he moistened and lighted his cigar, preparatory to wending his winding way down town again. “I wish you joy of your dilapidated homestead, your crow’s-nest, your decayed fences, and broken windows, neglected garden, and Jamestown weed-grown pleasure-grounds” (“gimsum,” he called this wild *Datura*), “all of which advantages are fairly stated here, while many more, no doubt, remain unacknowledged ; but, mark me, I shall have nothing to do with it.”

“Don’t decide rashly, Julius ; but surely you will have your supper before you set out.”

“Thank you, I have an engagement at Lan Clinton’s rooms. They roast the first oysters of the season there to-night, for the month has an R in it, and all the fellows of our club are to meet at the old stamping-ground to do me honor. Times have changed, old lady, thanks to you.”

And with this unusual tribute to the hand that cherished and sustained him, he went his way, to come back pitifully drunk at daylight, having incurred debts “of honor” (?) at the club to a larger amount than usual.

It was not until he grew sober, that, remembering what had occurred, he sought vainly in his pocket-book

for the means of satisfying his creditor—a blackleg, noted for his skill and his merciless exactions from his victims. The end of the matter was, that Mr. Howard was threatened with exposure before his peers, if the sum were not promptly forthcoming, and that he felt himself under the necessity of appealing to his wife for assistance in this dilemma, the details of which, however, he saw fit to keep to himself. Thus the precious gold she had received from Mulgrave had at once to be infringed upon, to satisfy the needs of this profligate (precious for the promise of refuge it afforded, if no more), but certain conditions were annexed to the payment of the two thousand dollars required to save Julius Howard's "*honor*" (God save the mark), which silenced all further cavil about the purchase of Briarheath.

It was agreed further, between the husband and wife, that the San Francisco property should be sold, and its proceeds invested in rehabilitating the residence of Judge Lynne, where, until their lands increased in value, they proposed to reside, living modestly on the proceeds of their bank stocks and the result of their joint labors, and in the cultivation of new family ties as well.

To all this Julius Howard, in his state of fresh humiliation, acceded readily, even going so far as to suggest the improvements he intended making in the condition of the arable land, and the sort of grapery he would superintend the building of in person, a crystal house like one he had seen in Maryland at the residence of some great personage.

Mr. Sutton was written to at once to commence repairs, and for this purpose funds were forwarded to him independently, and over and above the six thousand dol-

lars required for the first payment, which, as the executor of Mrs. Lynne, he was empowered to receive for the heirs.

It was understood that her two young sisters were to live with Mrs. Sutton, and that the brothers were to be placed at once in respectable schools or positions to insure their future welfare, so that Mr. Howard was to be relieved of all annoying burden accruing from the permanent presence of any member of the family of his wife under his roof. This was but justice to him, and Hester felt it so ; nor indeed had it been her wish to have any inmate in her house other than her husband. She was charmed with the whole arrangement, and once more the springs of hope were unsealed in her lonely heart.

Mr. Sutton kept her regularly informed of the progress of repairs and alterations, and of the change the Scotch gardener was effecting in the garden and grounds. She knew that the house was an admirable one, in spite of its neglected condition. The walls were of stone and of unusual thickness. The ceilings were lofty, the rooms were large, the halls and curved stairway spacious and well-proportioned, the windows wide, so that fresh paper and woodwork and a change in glazing and casement frames, and grates and marble mantels, would, she felt assured, make Briarheath a noble mansion.

She found herself lying at night dreaming of her future home, and assigning and arranging in imagination its furniture, its hangings, its book-cases. Pictures she could not yet afford, but some day these would follow, and though no children's faces might ever gladden its halls—those of her own, at least—there might still shine

lovely forms and eyes from its silent walls to suggest sweet thoughts or fill up lonely intervals when, weary of study and of the society of friends, she might be content to sit and gaze and dream. Mr. Howard, too, should at last find occupation, of which, to her, he seemed so pitifully in need.

Sympathy wasted here. A butterfly would consider it a hardship probably, to be put in a bee's harness, even if the horrors of winter were set at naught by the secure shelter of the hive; and there are men and women too, who rejoice in being purposeless and in everybody's way, as all people, without an object, are sure to be, sooner or later.

It was strange, was it not, how he, this drone in question, entered into all her plans for the *actual*, repudiate him as she might in her ideal dreams. Standing, as he did, in the very outmost vestibule of her soul, uncongenial in every way, in mind, in manner, in aspect, in opinion; still he was her daily care and thought beyond all earthly things. She could not bear to see him sad, or cold, or hungry, or athirst; she preferred (always had preferred) bearing physical suffering to seeing him endure it (and of any other kind she scarcely believed him capable); and yet in her heart there remained for him neither love nor respect, nor earnest sympathy.

There is a wonderful prestige about this same marriage tie when all else is over in hearts of true depth and feeling. It is sheer humbug to pretend that it can supply the want of requisite qualities or that one can truly honor what is dishonorable, or conscientiously obey what is inconsistent and fatuitous; but there is still a power in the words "husband," "wife," that finds no rival in lan-

guage and bears down all opposition whenever brought right home to the true-hearted.

The way was made very smooth that lay before her (one that she had feared to find a rugged path at first) by Mr. Howard's unwonted urbanity. Theatrical associations had proved extremely pleasant to him, with whom society of his own class was somewhat at feud; and Hester feared that regret for the loss of these might govern his estimate of her proceedings, for after the first he withdrew all opposition to her resolve to leave the stage. In proportion, as her mind was relieved from irksome duties, it expanded into the new channel her energies were forcing for their outlet.

The work she had planned and organized mentally was still very fragmentary as to execution; but as an opening wedge, she collected together some poems, which from time to time she had written as feeling or thought suggested this mode of expression, and sent them to an Eastern publisher, whose name only she knew at that period.

To her surprise they were accepted and favorably received, although they brought to her small profit, and no direct fame, since they were published anonymously. They had cost her little or no mental effort, were rather an outlet than an endeavor, and she had not dreamed of their value or result until she saw them extolled, and heard them quoted, as specimens of a style singularly fresh—eloquent and true voices of feeling that found a response, especially from every suffering nature.

Her husband and Mrs. Carisbrook were alone acquainted with this venture, which he considered a failure, and she a success, each estimating it according to the

different mode of judging results peculiar to these very opposite organizations, money being the criterion in one case, and the appreciation of true natures and unbiased critics that of the other. Manager Morton was not admitted to confidence because of his proclivity to boast of his protégé's excellence in every department; nor did Mr. Howard think it a matter to proclaim loudly that his wife had written a few trifling poems, which had gone the rounds, and never brought her in *one cent!*

So the matter rested in the shade, and yet there was one person who, in reading this little book, was startled into a sudden conviction of the identity of the writer with one he had known slightly under peculiar and painful circumstances. The reader was Doctor Mordaunt; the poem that supplied the clue entitled "Magnetic Chains." But of this subtle recognition Hester Howard knew nothing until years afterwards, nor could she even then very readily account for it, since the poem contained few details wherewith to point attention to any individual circumstance.

Strangely enough the publisher of these poems became deeply interested in their distant and unknown writer, and it was through his encouragement that she went resolutely to work, to struggle with and master the difficulties of the fiction she had imagined. So that by the time spring had opened, notwithstanding the requisitions of her profession on her time and energies, she had shaped it into perfectness, and made it ready for the press.

In June it was placed in his hands by a careful messenger, a private hand; and now for the first time the

name of the writer was confidentially intrusted to him, and that of "*Myrtis Lynne*" laid aside forever.

Hester left the stage in that regal month in which nature culminates to its point of perfection, and when the heart beats highest, the blood courses quickest, the mind thinks freest of all other periods in the slowly revolving year. Never had she felt so hopeful, so happy, so self-confiding since the loss of her children, as on that occasion and at that period, when in regaining her freedom she felt that she was grasping a new means of power, before unknown to her, and that fame as well as fortune now lay almost within her grasp.

She had felt her way only in her first publication, and in sounding the public taste had discovered for the first time how dear to her nature was the approbation of cultured spirits. The admiration of those who came to look on her as a mere spectacle had never moved her thus, and she who cared nothing for society, face to face, yearned for the remote expression of its sympathy, as a flower pines for the distant sunshine.

"It is a glorious thing," she thought, "to strike with a fine firm hand the full chords of comprehensive nature—sweep the human lyre. To be able to thrill alike the strong man, and the suffering woman, the impassioned girl, or the discouraged and doubting youth, unequal to the conflict of life, and strengthened, perhaps, to fresh endeavor by the utterance of one enthusiastic soul. If this compensation has been reserved for me, O Father, I shall thank Thee even more earnestly than for the wealth Thou hast caused to fall like a rich mantle above me, Thine unworthy and rebellious child, humbled, chastened, made ashamed by her prosperity!"

So at last the acknowledgment left her lips that ought to have been made long before, when fainting in the wilderness of despair.

Small thanks have we, small cause of gratulation, for recognizing our unworthiness when benefits are lavished upon us ; but it is great, it is noble, to submit to sorrow in the spirit of profound humiliation and confiding affection. Herein had Hester Howard been tried and found wanting !

She could go out and look at her children's graves now tearfully, yet not without hope. Some day she would remove their dust to her distant and ancient home, but now she could not bear to disturb their rest, for thus it seemed to her, after the common ignorance of tender, poetic souls, it would be doing to delve after, and dislodge their tiny coffins, above which violets were growing and willows bending.

The portion of the garden including these graves and the summer house was carefully reserved and separated from the rest by an iron railing, and the remainder of the property sold at a great advance on the original investment. A house and garden near by were purchased for Pardette, and presented to her as a nuptial present and acknowledgment of past services.

She was about to reward a faithful countryman with the gift of her hard hand and soft honest heart, and she bore him, through the liberality of her employers, what in his estimation was a fortune—a furnished house, a wardrobe and a cow ; the last, the patient pet and chief comforter of Hester Howard and her children in their days of unrepinning poverty.

With the result of the sale of their cottage, larger than

the price asked for Briarheath, and the remainder of the money Mr. Mulgrave had handed her (all of which Mr. Howard insisted on carrying away in gold, under some pretence of future premium, a step which Hester vainly opposed), the pair who have so far appeared together in real presence before our reader, however separate in spirit, turned their faces eastward, and saw the Golden Gate close behind them forever.

Briarheath was ready now for their reception, partly furnished as it was by such relics as Hester had insisted on retaining at any price, because her father had valued them, or her mother had owned them, and these had been sparsely and judiciously scattered through the house, so as to make it habitable from the first.

Joy and hope inspired the heart of the woman, going home to dwell among her own people, and still hoping to bring forth some good result from the hitherto useless life so closely entwined with hers. The impress of this new spirit fixed every eye upon her lovely face, instinct with sweetness, intellect, affection; and on the ship "Formosa" Mr. Howard was the envied man of all male observers. Towards his sweet wife he seemed, in public, to bear himself gallantly, and his manner even in private was less marked with irritability than was his wont, and far more forbearing.

Encouraged by this change, she built to herself fairy castles of future contentment, and flattered her self-love that her own finesse and wisdom had controlled for the best her husband's destiny—her husband, still so dear, though all that deserved the name of love was gone! More than ever she leaned on and clung to him, for now she first recognized in his behavior a spirit of

self-sacrifice, ever before a stranger to his conduct of life.

She was "fey," as the Scotch call it, and far more than dejection or presentiment does a mood like this with the high-strung children of the earth forebode misfortune.

Even as she smiled and confided, the bitterest cup of shame a woman is ever called upon to drink was mantling to her lips, held grimly there by one on whom she had heaped only benefit and mercy.

Arriving at Aspinwall, the passengers of the "Formosa" were constrained to wait a few days for the arrival of the New York steamer, whose return trip they meant to take advantage of, and which had been detained by adverse winds.

The railroad across the Isthmus was just completed, and connection of travel not perfectly established. In the course of a drive on the island, Mr. and Mrs. Howard encountered a young actress of more beauty than talent, to whom the latter had been unusually kind and considerate on some rather trying professional occasions for the novice, and Miss Le Noir expressed as much pleasure as she seemed to feel surprise at this unexpected meeting.

It would have been difficult to suppose, from the manner of either, that an appointment had been made between two of the greeting parties some weeks previous to their departure from San Francisco, and that the young person who had been honored by the notice of Mrs. "Myrtis Lynne" was in reality the secret paramour of her husband, and in league with him to destroy her peace of mind.

Suspecting nothing of this kind, it was with some

amazement that Hester Howard found her husband wanting in punctuality when the time came for the packet to leave the harbor. He had early in the morning caused their effects to be conveyed on board, and taken and given to her care the number of their state-room, and tickets for the voyage, and she now supposed that he had been in no condition, after a second visit to the vessel, to return for and escort her thither. Anxious and perplexed, she went on board and sought her allotted state-room, where, with Lora's assistance, she employed herself in arranging the luggage she found there, consisting of her individual boxes.

She had not time to remark that her husband's heavy iron-bound trunk, containing not only his wardrobe but their small chest of gold, was not among the articles she found in her room, and was expecting to hear his approaching step every miserable moment of suspense, when the clerk tapped at the door, and handed her a letter, with a face all unconscious of the misery he brought.

The superscription was Mr. Howard's. She tore it open and read it hastily, grew ashen pale, and threw her head back in her low cane-chair until it touched the wall, and there it rested, wildly, wearily, for bitter hours, during which the tramp of busy feet around her, the cries of the seamen, the dragging of heavy ropes above, and the shrill wail of the engine gathering up its giant forces for conflict with the waves, fell upon an ear as dull as if already of the dead.

"Your master is not going to New York with us, Lora," she said, at last, roused by her attendant's inquiries. "He has changed his mind, but do not mention

this to any one. What is more, never speak of him again to me or others, any more than if he were dead, Lora, dead! Don't question me"—seeing that the old woman with the privileged familiarity of a lifelong domestic and attendant was about to ask for an explanation.

"Don't question me now or hereafter. This is all that you will ever know from my lips on the subject, and now, take off my wrappings, and give me a cambric gown, and assist me to my bed, for I am ill, dear Lora, struck to the heart, and my life hangs on your care."

Hester Howard rose no more from her couch of suffering, and sleepless shame and sorrow, until the voyage, safe and pleasant usually at that time of the year, was nearly accomplished. She rallied then, and stood on deck with other passengers to catch the first glimpse of the Narrows and of imperial New York. Her face was so calm and placid, though grave and sad, that not one who beheld her dreamed for a moment that her heart lay humbled and half dead in her bosom, or that the bitterness of shame had driven the iron deep into her soul.

"I will *make* him dead!" was her last determination, "and I will treat his memory with such respect as we give the erring who have gone before us to the land of shadows! From my lips no one shall hear this history, unless in defence of my own life or honor, and the mourning I wear for my children shall be deepened in sorrow for his shame."

She had fortunately a few notes of some amount in her desk, and her ship-tickets had been *considerately* paid for by Mr. Howard, out of the twenty thousand dollars in gold he had carried off for his European tour with Miss Le Noir. So she arrived at Briarheath still in the

possession of some funds, enough at least to live on frugally for a time, and until the day should come appointed for the arrival of Mr. Mulgrave with fresh resources. New arrangements would then be made, whereby to satisfy all claims against her, although the cherished hope of a fixed and comfortable income should be deferred indefinitely by the perfidy of her treasurer and his flight.

It may seem to many who read these pages strangely inconsistent that the abandonment of this evil spirit of her life should have been other than a cause of rejoicing to his victim.

Yet the truth is told when I declare that for a season his conduct blighted her existence and darkened to her the very face of heaven.

Out of this mood she came after a time, shattered, wretched, yet outwardly calm and collected; but of his desertion she never spoke, even to Mrs. Carisbrook, her close and constant correspondent, or to her tried friend, Doctor Clarke.

They heard it, of course, after a season in some other way. Yet so quietly was this separation effected, and so closely was its cause concealed, that it was long before the truth was recognized.

It will be seen, hereafter, what singular perplexities were the consequence of the false position in which this reservation of the truth, this mistaken delicacy, placed one naturally upright and honorable, if reticent and reserved.

BOOK THIRD.

I pant for the music that is divine,
My heart in its thirst is a dying flower ;
Pour forth the sound like enchanted wine,
Loosen the notes in a silver shower.

* * * * *
Let me drink of the spirit of that sweet sound ;
More, oh, more ! I am thirsting yet ;
It loosens the serpent which care has bound
Upon my heart to stifle it.—SHELLEY.

Sleep, sleep on ! Forget thy pain :
My hand is on thy brow,
My spirit on thy brain,
My pity on thy heart, poor friend ;
And from my fingers flow
The powers of life, and like a sign
Seal thee from thine hour of woe.—SHELLEY.

BOOK THIRD.

CHAPTER I.

BRIARHEATH AND ITS BEARINGS—A VISIT OF CURIOSITY
AND CONDOLENCE—THE WORSHIP OF THE GOLDEN CALF
REVIVED.

MRS. HOWARD arrived by rail at Lynnesborough late in the evening, and had the satisfaction of passing through the town without being recognized, reaching the pleasant suburb which had grown out to meet and cultivate the once quiet lane on which stood the mansion of Judge Lynne, in the gray summer's twilight.

She had not been expected on that day, for Mr. Sutton had reason to await a warning telegram from New York before announcing the coming of the illustrious couple whose approach now agitated Lynnesborough to the centre, where their names had been almost forgotten, until Mr. Mulgrave came to counsel with Mr. Sutton about the advance on the lands of the estate committed to his charge.

It was soon understood that this piece of good fortune was confined to the eldest daughter and consequent Cinderella of the family, for (fairy tales notwithstanding) it has been my observation that to the position of seniority in a household usually appertains the martyrdom of self-abnegation, and that far from sitting in metaphorical rags

and ashes, it is the younger daughters who absorb all of the fine clothes and indulgences afforded by doting parents, too often like authors partial to their latest productions, however inferior to the first. Popular report had magnified this good fortune, as it does most matters, and even added the rumor that Mr. Howard had suddenly realized uncounted thousands by a speculation in town lots in San Francisco, which vagary had its rise, no doubt, in the sale he had effected there of his property.

People were never tired of extolling the filial reverence and pride of family Hester Lynne had displayed in the purchase and renovation of her father's homestead; and had it been the fashion at Lynnesborough (which by-the-by owed its name to Judge Lynne's progenitors) to make such demonstrations, there is little doubt that a procession would have been formed to meet the successful couple on their return, and conduct them home, gilded all over, as they seemed to popular eyes, with pecuniary renown, and fresh from the city of the Golden Gate itself.

There was something very oriental in the ideas that were cherished by the gossips of Lynnesborough in connection with this prosperous pair, and had they sprinkled their letters with golden dust, in order to dry their ink, instead of common sand, it would have astonished no one, nor been cause in their case of ridicule or censure.

Mr. Sutton had himself indulged in some pleasant dreams as to the reception of his illustrious relatives, among the foremost of which was a panoramic vision of the three sisters, drawn up in a row on the portico of the entrance at Briarheath, while he, in that superb equipage

hired out alone for State occasions or funerals, with its cream-colored horses and heavy fringed hammercloth, the principal hack of Lynnesborough and the only handsome carriage that burgh contained (all the rest, private or public, being truly hacks, while this vehicle, resplendent in brown, and crimson, and yellow, was a holiday coach, worthy of Whittington himself), lounged humbly on the seat or opposite to the Howards.

Judge then of his disappointment, when, on the day following her advent, a modest note reached him by mail at Sliding Stone, containing the information that Mrs. Howard had arrived at Lynnesborough on the preceding evening, and would be glad to see him as soon as convenient, *alone*, on the occasion of his first visit.

"I am not yet equal to seeing my sisters or Mrs. Sutton," the note went on to say, "having recently received a severe shock, from which I find myself but slowly recovering, and though prepared to welcome my father's daughters with sincere affection, I must beg the reprieve of a few days for my overtaxed nerves and delicate health. You will perhaps understand this state of feeling better when I tell you that I came alone to Briarheath, that I have lost my husband, who accompanied me to the Isthmus. Lost him too in a most painful manner, and have been ill ever since.

"You will oblige me, when we meet, by not referring to this incident, as it is one I can never bear to speak of even to my own family, and to request the forbearance of Sophia, and my sisters also, when they come, on the same delicate and painful subject."

"It's the most singular and absurd note I ever heard of or saw in the whole course of my life," said Sophia

Sutton, snatching it out of her husband's hands, when he had done reading it aloud, and glancing rapidly over its contents, as if to make sure of them.

"Mrs. Sutton, indeed! this late in the day, as if I was twenty years older than she is, when, if the truth be told, there are only three years difference between us. I'll let her know that James Wheeler stood as well before the world as her father ever did, for all she is too proud to call me sister, and the day my mother laid off her weeds to marry Judge Lynne she supped sorrow, and I have often heard her say so."

"But if she had not married him, the probability is she would not have supped at all," said Mattie, saucily, and her black eyes flashed. "Tailoring is a very respectable trade, though, and a needful one, even if not always profitable. I don't mean to disparage Mr. Wheeler by any means, for I dare say mankind could do better without justice than without breeches."

"I must say, for cool impertinence, Mattie Lynne," began Mrs. Sutton, but her husband interrupted her, as he rarely dared to do, by making a diversion, well knowing whither this dialogue would eventually lead his mischievous sister-in-law and pugnacious wife.

"I suppose it is her way of telling us that she is a widow," he said, resuming possession of the note which, during the excitement of Mrs. Sutton's temper, had fluttered from her fingers. "He died of Chagres fever, probably—it is nearly always fatal to strangers, I have heard—and suddenly, too; or he may have been killed by an accident, who knows? drowned in getting off ship-board, may be, or shot by some Spanish desperado, or fallen in a duel; no one can conjecture what *may* have

happened to him, but I confess I should like very much to hear the particulars."

"Or perhaps he is not dead at all," said Mattie, sharply, "and she lost him on purpose, as Tom Thumb's mother did her children; took them out in the jungle of Panama like poor Strain, and left him there. I am sure I should do the same if chance bestowed on me such a mate as we all know him to have been to sister Hester. Why she was perfectly poverty-stricken at one time, report says, and that wretch drunk in the streets."

"But all this has been redeemed, my dear impulsive young sister," said Mr. Sutton, tapping her mildly on the shoulder, in an admonitory manner, "and the least said about it the better. Mr. Howard became an eminently respectable man before his demise, for of this sad event there *can* be no reasonable doubt, and remittances were promptly sent to me for all the work I superintended at Briarheath. My commission, too, was liberally allowed for, and of course it was with his consent that all this was done by your sister Hester. Walter and George would not now be pursuing professions, but for the disinterestedness of these relatives, for in its dilapidated condition no one else would have touched the homestead, which it cost so much to renovate, and the purchase money has worked wonders for us all."

"Bought us a home at Sliding Stone!" said Mrs. Sutton, contemptuously, "and some coals for next winter, when we may all be in our graves; and a few calico dresses and lawns for our summer wear. I can see no other result, I confess, in my case, or that of the children and girls."

"And opened a way for me to make your bread," said Mr. Sutton, earnestly; "a way that I confess I did not see

before, for your small share, Sophia, of your mother's interest, paid down in gold, has sufficed for this. Look back on all of our struggles, our poverty, our dependence even, at one time, and be grateful now."

"But why could not we have kept Briarheath, just as it was, brother Sutton?" asked Melissa. "I am sure sister Hester would never have objected (rich as she is) to giving up her share to us, and then, we should *all* have still maintained our ancient standing. It is very hard for Judge Lynne's daughters to have to retire to Sliding Stone, among miserable mills and filthy foundries, and leave delightful Lynnesborough."

"You question idly, Melissa," was the grave response of the subdued-looking man sitting opposite to her, with one long, lank leg carelessly thrown over the other, of which he hugged the knee in a despairing manner, as though to sustain himself thereby, indicative of his languid and hopeless temperament as this was.

"What could *we* have done," he resumed, "powerless to move hand and foot, as are all the moneyless people of this world; with the weeds and brambles, the decayed fences, the untilled fields, the low, wet meadow, or the dilapidated mansion of Briarheath, the very windows of which were gaping to the road, paneless and shutterless? I begin to think women, as a class, incapable of reasoning!" So saying, he went quietly away to catch the first train for Lynnesborough, so as to obey his appointment for the hour of noon. He had unconsciously formed an ideal of Mrs. Howard very opposite from reality, having the usual estimate of dash and style which persons unaccustomed to society cherish, in which Queen Zenobia or the Queen of Sheba, one or both, enter largely.

He was both relieved and disappointed, therefore, when a woman, scarcely above middle stature, graceful, yet slight; and handsome, certainly; not imposing at all in presence, singularly pale and sad-looking, and clothed in deep mourning, glided into the large, empty parlor in which he tremulously awaited her approach. The closed shutters, the bare floors, the sparsely scattered ancient horse-hair chairs, the dingy sideboard, covered with battered family plate, the antique centre-table, fiercely clawing the floor with its carved dragon's feet, the high old-fashioned candelabra on the Egyptian marble mantel, the discrepancy and dreariness of the apartment, seemed singularly suited to the occasion of this meeting, and even to those who composed it, dreary as these two were, though undoubtedly after different fashions.

"I am sorry I did not know of your intended coming," said Mr. Sutton, after the first greetings, chill enough as these were on one side, lowly enough on the other to have satisfied the shade of Uriah Heep himself; "sorry that I could not have met you, and, perhaps, the corse of your lamented husband at the depot."

"It is much better as it is, I am sure, for both of us," she responded, with a faint smile, called up by the singular daring of this meek man's curiosity, a remark to which Mr. Sutton responded with a still drearier bow, made with closed eyes, and a flourish of his folded handkerchief.

"In a few days I shall be able to receive my sisters, I hope," she resumed, "and, in the meantime, I wish to thank you for the great pains you have taken to carry out all *our*—*my* wishes; and the unexpected beauty of

the result—" she hesitated. "I want also to say that should any of the bills for work remain unpaid, I shall be obliged to ask your forbearance until the arrival of Mr. Mulgrave, the agent, who has promised, in a short time, to bring me necessary funds."

"Certainly, madam, certainly! The balance is very small, and the workmen are not importunate, knowing *me*, and your entire ability to discharge all obligations," and again he bowed.

A pause ensued more dreary than disagreeable; for after all there was very little to be said between these parties, and yet to prevent further intrusion and distress Mrs. Howard had deemed it best to write as she had done.

The silence was broken by Hester.

"You have children, Mr. Sutton, I believe?"

"Four, madam, four," in a sepulchral tone, as if he were enumerating their deaths by cholera. "One of my own," he continued, "I mean by my first marriage, and three of Sophia's. I hope you will like our children, and yet I fear that they are sadly spoiled; their mother is over-indulgent."

"A lovely fault, if such a thing may be. I think to be severe with little children is simply barbarous. Any one can intimidate a little child; the art is to please and persuade them."

"Which is sometimes difficult to do," with a ghastly smile, disclosing pale-blue teeth, and evanescent as a wintry gleam of sunshine on a gray December's day.

"The man has suffered," the lady thought. "Who would not, with a Wheeler at his fireside? Sophia was always fearfully like her mother."

And she shuddered at some memories that swept over her. Among others those appertaining to her wedding-day.

The interview was interrupted here by the sound of wheels on the still, rugged gravel walk, and the tones of a round and unctuous voice, a "plush-footed" voice (Mattie Lynne used to call it pleasantly in her peculiar fashion of metaphorical description), asking of the housemaid for "Mr. and Mrs. Howard, late of California!"

It was some moments before Hester recognized, advancing in the shadow, the burly form of the Rev. Elias Crawford, the ancient pastor, as he still continued to be, of Lynnesborough meeting-house, or as the English would call him, the "dissenting minister" of that burgh.

He was greatly changed since Hester Lynne had heard him hold forth at the village chapel, whither she went occasionally with her step-mother, though her father's hereditary pew was elsewhere; his very voice had grown fat and drowsy with his person, and his hair was white and scant, while his eyes were scarcely visible between his flabby cheeks.

"I shouldn't have known you! I tell you I shouldn't have known you had I met you anywhere else on the face of the earth except in the old Lynne mansion. Why, madam, you are positively the handsomest of them all, and that is saying much, isn't it now, Elder Sutton?" at which priestly joke the unhappy martyr simpered, and replied that he believed "that point was given up long ago; he had always heard of Miss Hester's beauty, and her sisters were all proud of it."

Transparent Sutton! The calm, great eyes were sorry for you, for they read your pebbly soul. Serene

and gentle, if a little muddy sometimes, and not naturally deceptive, nor given to whirlpools, or quicksands, only pitifully shallow. Yet she pitied him too much to refute him as she could readily have done from olden recollections.

"And how is Mr. Howard after his long voyage?" said the fat voice, "and where are your little ones? Come, I must see them all. There's no escaping the dictates of Father Crawford, as the people call me here, a title I appreciate, madam, and perhaps deserve. Come, how many of them are there, nurse?" turning to the door where Lora was calmly standing with folded arms, waiting for the orders of her mistress to bring the box destined for the young ladies and Sophia, and which contained a variety of handsome presents selected and purchased before setting out from San Francisco, on that fatal voyage. "Nurse, bring in the children!"

"Lord bless your heart, Massa Crawfoot, doesn't you 'member 'ole Lora?" and coming forward she shook the pastor by both hands. Not that she had ever particularly liked him, but that the rejoicing was general with her over all "old familiar faces."

"As fur de children, Massa Crawfoot, I tought you knew," and she applied the corner of her apron to her overflowing eyes, perennial fountains of sorrow, whenever they were mentioned.

Then Hester spoke, coldly, drearily, dryly, without a tone, a shadow of emotion in her voice, or manner, or face; the latter like a stone.

"I have had the misfortune to lose all of my immediate family, Mr. Crawford. I am alone, as you see me, *alone!*" and she suddenly threw out her arms and

fell senseless to the floor before any hand could interfere, fell thus for the first time in her life.

The gentlemen bent over her deeply shocked, and rendered her all the assistance in their power, when they left her to old Lora, only prevented by her entreaties and assurances that her mistress would be displeased from sending for the family physician, Doctor Hubbard Patterson.

They waited together in the parlor until they were assured that she had revived, and then went their several ways, determining, however, before they parted, in compassionate conclave, that they would *hold back* their tide of womankind as long as possible, from overwhelming and thoroughly submerging the poor sufferer, so recently bereaved, and struggling so far vainly to reach the shore of serenity from the waves of her terrific sorrow.

CHAPTER II.

AN IMPORTANT INTERVIEW—WISE RESOLUTIONS—MATTIE'S SCHEME.

A FEW days later Mr. Mulgrave came. "Mrs. Howard, I find you solitary," he said, abruptly, soon after the black-draped figure, so graceful and refined under every disadvantage, entered the same dreary parlor in which the mistress of Briarheath had so lately yielded to her great agony; adding as no man better versed in the usages of society would have dared to do: "I know not yet whether this solitude

of yours be cause to you of congratulation or condolence."

"Nor need you concern yourself to know, Mr. Mulgrave," and her voice trembled slightly. "Confine yourself, I beg, to the business before us, about which Mr. Howard has probably communicated to you himself; at least, he told me that he had done so in the last letter I received from him."

"He has done so partially, at least; it is of the yearly stipend that you speak?"

"It is."

"You can afford nothing of the kind, Mrs. Howard. This demand exceeds all the income you can expect to derive from your bank stocks, for the purchase of which I have sold the lands we spoke of. Some of this lies at interest, of course, for the present."

"If possible," she resumed, "I wish his—his conditions complied with."

"Four thousand dollars! It is a great demand out of annual sales. For how long a time will this separate maintenance be required?" he interrogated her sharply.

"I cannot tell: for a long time, probably; but you said, I remember, that the property was rising rapidly, that you could sell a large amount this year, more the next, and so on to the end. I have thought that by limiting my own expenditures, which even in this large house can be done to a few hundred a year, by judicious management, I might be able to supply his *requisitions*."

"*Requisitions*! Are they such?" he asked, dwelling heavily on the first word, illegal as he felt it. "Understand me, once for all, Mrs. Howard, he has no right to make any requisitions of you—no right. You have

everything in your own power; you can do with it as you please, especially under the peculiar circumstances of this case."

"You are aware of these?" she questioned, abruptly lifting her eyes to his face for a moment.

"Perfectly," was his grave reply. Her eyes dropped beneath his clear significant gaze, and for a time there was silence.

"I will ask you," she said, making a great effort, "*not* to reveal these particulars to any person, here or elsewhere. I suppose it is from Mr. Howard himself you have learned them. I judge this from the mention he made to me of his letter to you. I hope you consider everything he has told you strictly confidential." She hesitated, then continued, "let his very existence remain to strangers a matter of doubt."

"Certainly, if you request it, madam."

"I *do* request it," she said in a manner that rather implied command than entreaty.

"I am to understand, then," he said, "that for reasons of your own you wish this annual stipend regularly paid? That you prefer such payment to the possibility of—" he hesitated.

Even his audacity could not carry him further at the moment, while she sat confronting him, calm, cold, imperious, with her lips livid, her eyes like blazing steel, her face locked and rigid.

He was afraid to hazard more; yet he wished, oh! how he wished that he dared counsel her, and aid her even, to fling off this reptile clinging to the skirts of her prosperity, yet outraging every instinct of her womanhood so grossly as to provoke every just man's indignation.

"The matter can be effected, Mrs. Howard, at least for the present, I am positive," he said, plunging at once into actualities and letting motives alone, as his good sense taught him was best for the present.

"I have deposited thirty thousand dollars in bank, or its equivalent, wherewith to buy, in time, the stocks, as you requested. It all awaits your order. Draw a check for the amount required for Mr. Howard, a promissory note for as much more to be paid in a twelve month. I will indorse it. Should you need other means for your own immediate expenses, reserve them also from this fund; then let me, in God's name, madam, go and invest your money as soon as possible and before it vanishes into thin air."

She smiled, well pleased at his disinterested vehemence, and obeyed his counsels promptly. The checks were drawn and signed.

"I shall furnish my house only partially at this time," she said. "A piano and books I *must* have, in short a library well-fitted up, and another bed-chamber or two, some dining service also, so that my friends may not deem me churlish when they come to see me. Beyond this I shall not go, until I realize something more, perhaps, from my own exertions. No, not another step."

"You have then a purpose in life?" he said. "I congratulate you: it is a rare resource for a woman."

"I write sometimes—"

"And publish?"

"I am thinking of something of that sort," she said, vaguely.

"Do you know," he said, looking at her earnestly, "you are very like an actress I once saw in New Orleans,

a 'Mrs. Myrtis Lynne.' I never thought of it until just now; though I have often wondered who it was you resembled so strikingly. Did you ever see her perform?"

"I have seen her in San Francisco."

It was very evident he had not the slightest idea of Hester's identity with the person in question, nor did she care to enlighten him; yet he persevered:

"How did you like her performance?" he asked, pertinaciously.

"Pretty well. I never thought her heart was in her vocation, however."

"Likely not, but her brains were."

She did not invite Mr. Mulgrave to remain at Briarheath beyond one day. Yet his visit had quieted her spirit as few things could have done. The wolf was driven from the door, her debts were paid, Mr. Howard's yearly stipend provided for, peace re-established, and Briarheath was at last her own, and partly furnished.

"I will live down this grief," she thought, "in my own way. It shall not corrode my heart. I will make occupation my *Ægis* of defence, and intrench myself in my strength of purpose. Music, poetry, belles-lettres of all kind I will cultivate to some perfection, and when I am weary of all the rest, my pen shall carry me away like John Gilpin's horse, whither it lists, ay, even if to destruction."

Musing, she smiled. Her conclusions were so different ever from her beginnings. Yet still she determined to obtain the mastery over what at best was *but* a bitter mortification.

At the end of a fortnight, her household was suf-

ficiently systematized to permit her to send for her sisters to pass one day at Briarheath. She would see and study them first before admitting them to further intimacy. She could not bear to think of inmates yet a while.

They came, and were received with hospitable care and sisterly affection, and almost felt that they were reconciled to seeing Briarheath in such hospitable hands. Their sister had indeed manifested a sort of wistful solicitude to please them that soothed their "amour propre." Even Mrs. Sutton acknowledged that she was "the lady," if very quiet and reticent about her affairs; for in the course of the whole visit they could not recall one reference to her past.

One thing they determined on in conclave. She was to be respected, conciliated, clung to as the sole pillar of their fallen fortunes, from whom all largesse beyond the mere necessities of life must come, if it ever came at all. All marriage gifts, all rich apparel for ball or watering-place, every means of conveyance to and fro, all luxuries of life in short must emanate from the rich proprietress of Briarheath. "Our golden goose," as Mattie saucily called her.

A few days after this first visit, an elaborate letter was penned and despatched by Mattie Lynne to her new-found sister, to which she received so kind an answer that she was encouraged to pack up her small effects in a hand-satchel, and quietly depart from Sliding Stone, so as to avoid all questioning and discussion on the part of her sisters, and to reserve to herself the privilege of giving what account she chose of her proceeding on her return. She left word with their only house-maid that she would be absent some days on business in Lynnesborough, and

so satisfied anxiety on her account, which otherwise she feared might have developed itself in the shape of an advertisement on the part of Brother Sutton, headed, "escaped!"

"Mattie, you here?" exclaimed Mrs. Howard, as the slight figure of the girl stole to her side in the library, where she sat dreaming in the twilight before an early autumn fire. "Why, my dear girl, did you not apprize me of your intention?"

"I did not know I was coming myself until an hour before I left Sliding Stone. I was obliged to take you by surprise. They are so queer down there."

"You did not quite do this. I have been expecting you daily since I wrote. Your letter interested me very deeply, I assure you. I was amazed at the ability with which it was written, too, and the experience it betrayed. Yet you are very young, Mattie, to have thought and suffered so. Just seventeen next Christmas. I remember the very day you were born, a cold and snowy Sunday, and how I was thrilled, I myself a very little child then when I held you in my arms; your great, black eyes as wide open as they are now; you were always little and spiritual-looking, even as an infant."

"Did you love me then, sister Hester?" said Mattie, with emotion in her voice.

There was a moment's silence. Then Hester replied: "I was not permitted to do so, Mattie, but it is not yet too late to begin. I feel very near, of course, to my father's daughter; yet the habit of affection is still to be acquired between us."

"You are right," said Mattie. "It is only men and women who fall in love with each other at first sight.

There is something about you that attracts me, however, I suppose (or I should scarcely have written you as I did), almost against my will. It was as though some one else were guiding the pen and impelling me. I do not often write so eloquently, I assure you. I was a little startled myself when I read over my own production, and found how I had let myself go all through, and blistered the pages with my tears. You see, sister Hester, I am not of the crying kind."

"You have a brave little heart of your own, I know, to make such plans for independence; but have you pondered them well? A teacher's lot is a very hard one, especially for a mercurial nature like your own, and as you have not been used to study, as you acknowledge, two years of the labor of preparation for such a vocation in school-harness would go very hard with you I imagine. Now give it all up from this hour, and come and live with me. You shall want for nothing, not even affection."

"That would not be the same thing at all, sister Hester," said the girl, solemnly, laying her hand on her companion's arm, and looking steadily in her face with her large, inscrutable black eyes. "I want to be independent. Don't you understand the difference? Now if you choose to help me get this education, I will repay you when I come of age. I have some means of my own, you know, which brother Sutton—that poor, good, crafty, overburdened soul—is trying to get out of a snarl so as to render me a support, and out of this I will return every cent you advance me; but I should rust to the very heart, living there and doing nothing and knowing nothing, before those four long years rolled round that

still lie between me and twenty-one; and then I should be too old and stupid to study at all."

Hester smiled at the girl's idea of age.

"I am not old and stupid, Mattie; yet I am twenty-six," she said, "and studying still."

"But your life does not lie before you, sister Hester, rather behind; you have already acquired knowledge, fortune, position. I have all this to do for myself, you know, for they tell me I am too ugly to marry well, and I am too proud to marry ill, so I run the risk of playing the solo in the orchestra of life, and I want a fife of my own."

"You are an oddity, Mattie, I believe."

"So are you, sister Hester, I discover."

Mrs. Howard smiled at the sharpness of the retort, but said nothing in continuance of this vein of recrimination, while Mattie stood defiantly, having withdrawn from her embrace at the farther end of the rug, with a flashing eye and crimson cheek.

"My dear girl, how have I offended you? Do come and have some refreshment. Give me your hand and don't be in the least irritable with me, for if you only knew it, I need all your sympathy."

She drew the mollified girl gently along to the dining-room, where a luncheon tray awaited them, and gently removing her gray straw bonnet and shawl, led her to a seat at the table, while she sat well pleased and enjoyed her wholesome hearty appreciation of the dainties spread before her.

"You will not live this way at school, dear Mattie," she said, with a little shake of the head. "The fare is hard, usually, and you are something of a sybarite, I fancy."

"Well, what if I am, sister Hester? It is all the better for me to be deprived of luxuries. I should grow as fat as a reed bird in September, if I had good things to eat every day, for I never could resist them; besides *what* an inducement is this for one reasonable woman to hold out to another? I thought you had a better opinion of my sense, sister Hester, or"—she added archly, "somewhat more yourself."

"You are a very impertinent little damsel," said Mrs. Howard, laughing, "quite irresistible though in your way."

"Call me anything but odd, and I can forgive you; but I am so worn out with that epithet that it sets all my nerves on edge. Now the fact is, I am not odd, which conveys a reproach, I fancy. Crazy people are odd, and so are stupid people and absent-minded, one-ideaed people, of all others the most tiresome; but I am neither one nor the other of all these things. I am very rational, keen-witted and wide awake, but like yourself, sister Hester, have my own views and reservations, and I mean to hold them too, as you doubtless intend to do—that is, if you can, in Lynnesborough."

Mrs. Howard started slightly.

"To what do you allude, Mattie? Have you heard me brought under discussion in this sagacious borough? Have they weighed me in the balance and found me wanting?"

"Not yet, sister Hester, but they are getting the scales ready."

"Well," said Mrs. Howard, reassured, "I am willing they should proceed; they will find it heavy work, I fancy." She leaned her brow on her hand and mused,

while Mattie eyed her locked features with a strange expression of irony and concern blended.

"Now, infidel, I have you on the hip," she murmured to herself, "and if I chose I could sift you in ten days' time," she pursued in thought, "but I won't do it, I won't do it; I'll spare your feelings for the sake of the blood in your veins and mine. You're worth ten of Sophy and Melissa any day, even if stripped of your possessions and reduced to the attic chamber and Cinderellaism again."

"You think yourself very weighty then; California gold dust sister Hester," she said, mockingly. "I should not suppose, all told, you would weigh more than one hundred and thirty pounds, if so much, and there are scales in Lynnesborough to compass that."

"Mattie, you are possessed"—

"Yes, with the spirit of mischief, many say, which you must lay, sister Hester, with your Prospero wand. Did you ever read 'Tempest,' by-the-by? now tell me honestly, with all your reading? If you did not, why then I am a head and shoulders taller than you, that's all," and she suited the action to the word by springing from the table, and drawing up her little flexible figure to its full height with an amusing ostentation of dignity.

"Yes, child, I have read it over and over again, until like a word we repeat a thousand times, it almost seemed unmeaning to me at the last. Shakespeare is not to me what he once was, never can be again."

"Then I pity you, sister Hester, I do indeed. Why one would think you had been helping to murder the deer-stealer by tearing him to rags on the stage, to hear you maligning him. We always hate those we injure, you know. Tacitus said so ever so many thousand years

ago. I know this, for I read it with my own eyes in that old romance of his, which Mr. Sutton has stored away in his bookcase."

"Romance, Mattie? that was history."

"History, then. Humbug! what's the difference now, so that it sticks in one's brain and diverts one's ideas from self and suicide? You are too literal to understand *me*, sister Hester. You have not a grain of imagination, I do believe, in your whole composition."

Hester smiled again, as she thought of the review she had been reading of her own new and most imaginative work just before she saw Mattie, and of which she had been musing aloud, perhaps, as she stood cowering over that bright autumnal fire which lighted for her no happy home circle, and illumed only a desolate hearth. But she did not defend herself from her little sister's fresh attack at all, but meekly said, "One fancy, like yours, Mattie, is enough for any one sober family, I'm thinking, and now let us talk further of your plans."

That night Mattie dreamed. She thought that she saw her sister Hester lying on a bed, curtained with white, in a strange house, not dead, but in a sleep so profound that it resembled death more than any slumber she had ever beheld or conceived of. The room was quite shadowy, and old Lora sat by the bedside. Suddenly she saw the figure of a man enter the room with a pale but noble face (it seemed half concealed in shadow), and a mien of gentle dignity. He bent over the sleeping woman and placed a ring on her insensible hand, then kissing it reverently, rose up and went his way. Then all was confused and dark, and she awoke. The clock on the chimney was striking five, the lamp was burning

low, but she felt impelled to raise her hand and look on a ring she had taken from the piano, after her sister had retired, and slipped on her finger to keep safely for her until morning.

It was the onyx, bearing the carved head of Christ engraven upon it, which Doctor Mordaunt had given her; and its size embarrassed Mrs. Howard so much in playing that she frequently drew it off and laid it aside until she rose from the piano. Account for the vision as one may, it simply occurred in connection with that ring, of whose origin Mattie Lynne had not the slightest idea, as far as any one ever knew. Nor was Mrs. Howard more agitated and overcome than the girl herself, when, after relating her dream, she found it unexpectedly confirmed as truth, by her sister's narration. Thus had she almost involuntarily begun already to sift the past, one link of whose varied chain had mysteriously passed into her keeping in this unaccountable manner.

Lora threw up her eyes and hands to heaven, when informed of the vision.

"Dat gal got an Obi look, anyway," she said to herself. "I do wish Miss Hester would keep all dat brood at dere 'spectible distance. I knowed when I seed her stealin' back here so soon, and all by herself too, dat she done come for no good to oders. Den she runs all 'bout dis strange house, from garret to kitchen, like a chicken widout no hen to go under; what ef she did live here all her life? It ain't nothing but a strange house all the same to her and hern since Miss Hester done come to her own, and dem rats all skeared out ob de garret, and de new paintin' and paperin', and friskin' on de ceilings all been put on at *our* 'spence, and dem bay-windows

stuck out like beetles' eyes ebery side, de very windey sashes changed in size and color, tell dey looks like new waffle irons sot straight up to dry, and de very ash-house with a tin roof and made of bran new bricks.

"Pump Lora, will dey? I heered dat Miss Sophy Sutton talked about doin' of dat. He, he! dey might as well try to get maple sap out of a gum-tree, as Californney news out ob dis church, sister! Pump Lora, he, he, he! dat 'muses me more dan to hear dey all gone up to live at Sliding Stone, where all de poor railroad hands used to stay for cheap, and nobody in de town owned a darkie.

"Take me away from dat sort of poor white trash, anyway, if dey is Judge Lynne's secon' wife's outside chillun."

CHAPTER III.

A MODERN TROUBADOUR AND HIS MANTLE—A MUSICAL RAID.

THE end of Mattie's visit was attained and she went joyfully back to Sliding Stone to make her preparations, few and simple as these were, for passing two years at a celebrated school in the State of New York, whence many accomplished teachers had emerged. Mrs. Howard had her misgivings on the subject of Mattie's mission, scarcely believing that so erratic and impetuous a person could ever become sufficiently self-contained to fulfil the grand and important task ably, of moulding the young mind; but she was struck with the stern purpose of the girl, and felt that, beside the obtaining of a

means of livelihood, the discipline of those two years might be greatly serviceable in shaping her own character and determining the happiness of her future life—"career," Mattie would have called it in preference.

The society of Lynnesborough had never been interesting to Hester, and I know few more dreary sensations in life than being cast back among people you have outgrown, and finding them unchanged and unimproved, yet self-satisfied at a dead stand in their former uncongenial condition. There are places that seem as torpid as the upas tree is deadly, resembling that plant only in the strange influence of their overhanging shadow on all that come within its range. No one could have lived long at Lynnesborough, unless isolated as Mrs. Howard was, without dropping into its dull routine of busy commonplaces and deadly lively gossip so fatal to wholesome thought and energy.

It was with a heartsick consciousness of this kind that she put away from her all near approaches on the part of its inhabitants, and resigned herself to comparative solitude; for, with the exception of good Mr. Steinbach and his youthful granddaughter, and the Misses Dean, the two last her mother's old friends, retiring gentlewomen of a certain age, unaffectedly pious, sensible and self-contained, though not remarkably interesting either as to appearance or conversation, she received no social visitors except her own family, the last rarely and ceremoniously in one way, though with hospitable kindness and generous disregard of self in another.

There are none who bore us like our own relations when uncongenial, none who so try our patience and

wring our nerves. Happy those who are permitted to select their companionship, and not forced to blindly accept such as fate or circumstances foist upon them.

Blood is thicker than water, saith the proverb, and it grows so thick occasionally that it curdles. Woe for the possessors then!

There is no hatred known to man like that which follows such a curdling process! It began in the veins of Cain, but the end is not yet, and sometimes it becomes epidemic and runs riot through the hearts of nations, and then, O God! what ruthless ruin, demoniac cruelty and morbid misrule are the consequences, none but those who suffer from its frenzied inhumanity can ever know, no record give any faithful account of, save that kept on high by God and his regretful angels.

For pity as they may, necessity must have its course, though thrones and hearthstones be the sacrifice; and this we *must* believe if we would retain our faith in the justice of Providence or our affection for our Creator.

Mr. Steinbach used to remind Hester of Wordsworth's "Village Schoolmaster," with his "hair of glittering gray," in the cheerfulness, the patient fortitude, the desolateness of his condition. With the exception of his orphan grandchild, no relative remained to him on earth, nor had his loving yet timid nature found any one to repose on in the land of his adoption, whose language he spoke imperfectly, and whose ways were not his ways, and never became so.

He occupied a small house in an obscure part of Lynnesborough, served by an old countrywoman of his own, whose hideousness of aspect was more than atoned for by the warm and faithful heart within, and knowing

no companionship save that of the child he fostered, a pleasing but not pretty girl of ten or twelve years old, gentle, modest, and intelligent. He gave lessons in the female academy of Lynnesborough, where also his child was being educated, and as far as could be known his whole support came from this slender resource.

To this had been added now the munificent bounty of Mrs. Howard, for thus he estimated her patronage, and none but the timid and obscure can know what happiness the notice and the hospitality of this mature pupil gave the poor old expatriated man, single and simple-minded as a child, as men usually are who devote themselves wholly to one idea, or one pursuit, whether of art or science or mechanics.

He dined with Mrs. Howard every Saturday, leading to Briarheath his little girl by the hand, often with a carnation stuck in his button hole, and always in his best array. Poor and seedy enough was this holiday suit of his, and so scrupulously clean as to appear even more poverty-stricken than had less care been apparent in its preservation. Gertrude Steinbach was attired after the usual quaint fashion of motherless children, who have no female adviser or deviser of tasteful apparel near at hand and small means for paraphernalia.

The old gentleman had an eye for the picturesque. He esteemed a scarlet skirt trimmed with mazarine blue gimp and a black "jump" jacket, or basque, bedizened with brass buttons, a very tasteful street costume, especially when set off with a straw hat and feather of the obsolete style called gipsey, very pretty in itself, but entirely irrelevant to fashion or season or keeping, at that day. Fortunately poor Gertrude was too artless and too young

to be very accessible to ridicule; but Hester was unspeakably annoyed for her, and the only manner in which she could proceed with delicacy was to command for the little girl a complete outfit at Christmas, in a more subdued and modern style of attire, which she presented under cover of the custom of the season, and through which Gertrude was at once transfigured, greatly to her own gratification.

This and many other acts of kindness, delicately performed, won the devoted affection of poor old Mr. Steinbach, who in his heart of hearts considered Hester the most lovely, noble, and royal of her sex, and vowed in his knightly Teutonic fashion to dedicate his whole life, if needful, to her service.

He was what so many of his countrymen impudently pretend to be, a man of gentle birth and breeding, though poor from the beginning of his existence, and repressed by circumstances later. His very passion for music had made against him in the practical affairs of life, nor had he possessed the self-confidence or force of character to make it a means of pecuniary profit. So he found himself, at sixty-five, stranded high and dry on the shores of poverty—yet independent in his way, since he narrowed his wants to fit his means, and asked of no man a favor, great or small. He was truthful, honorable, and pure-hearted, and this Mrs. Howard, with instinctive clear-sightedness, had soon perceived, through the disguise of age, poverty, positive homeliness, considerable awkwardness of manner (caused chiefly by extreme diffidence and near-sightedness, for his habits of life were gentlemanly and even refined), and humility of position, for he was a cypher in Lynnesborough. He had been

once proposed as organist to the Episcopal chapel at that place, but rejected on account of his Catholic proclivities. Yet the scholars of Mrs. Peters, the principal of the great Lynnesborough academy, were, without regard to their denominations, permitted to take lessons of him at her house, and whenever a concert was given for the benefit of the missionary or tract society he was graciously suffered gratuitously to take part!

As to breaking bread with him no one in that ancient and aristocratic town had ever dreamed of such a thing. So he was fain to sit down with his old Gorgon of a housekeeper and little girl, day after day, throughout the whole year, to his simple fare of cabbage soup or sauerkraut, or bouilli, or stewed prunes, or café au lait and cold dry bread, served in the same yellow white delf and unredeemed by a single dainty dish, such as he knew well how to enjoy, but could not afford to provide for his own entertainment.

If rich people would only feast their poor, meritorious neighbors sometimes, instead of carrying coals to New Castle by propitiating one another with dainties, how much more just and sensible it would be! But of course it would require rare delicacy to do this in the proper spirit so as to save the feelings of timid and sensitive guests, and make them feel that the favor was on their side. Hester Howard understood this true secret of hospitality, and when Mr. Steinbach was revelling in her jellies and fowls and soups and pastries, he had a perfect consciousness that she enjoyed her dinner twice over through the medium of his unaffected appetite.

Musicians are very prone to be fond of the pleasures of the table all the world over, and this, it must be con-

fessed, was Mr. Steinbach's weakness, one that he innocently avowed as well as demonstrated on occasion. He was temperate, however, as to excess either in food or wine, and well bred enough to control any inordinate expression of delight in his plate, neither grunting nor snorting over it, as Doctor Johnson did, nor snapping up his food greedily like Rousseau, as if it might else escape him, or tearing it like Louis the Eighteenth; but rather did he rejoice to linger lovingly with his knife and fork, and rest confidently between morsels, waiting patiently to be served from any dish to come, and never evidencing any symptoms of repletion, so that it was Hester's belief that to be at table was his normal condition.

I am afraid Mr. Steinbach will not rise in my reader's opinion when I make the acknowledgment that her good dinners, so lavishly bestowed, did much to cement his affection to Mrs. Howard. But if he enjoyed these daintily served repasts—china and glass in keeping with meat and wine—it was a far higher and more exquisite delight to him to sit daily before the superb instrument placed at his disposal, and give up his whole being to the rapture of Mozart, or Beethoven, or Mendelssohn, or Chopin, secure of the transfixed attention, and profound appreciation of his only auditor.

"You should go, madam, to hear the opera," he said, one day, as he witnessed her deep delight in the music of the "Trovatore," then new to the American world. "You will never know what it is to *forget yourself* until you yield your soul to the influence of a great opera. Ah! it is that, that is life-giving, and feeling full!" (How had he chanced upon that refrain of her soul?)

"I believe I *will* go, Mr. Steinbach," she said, after a

pause, which he deferentially regarded, as hers to break first, "that is, if you will go with me. I am too poor a traveller to venture alone again!" and the memory of that terrific trip of hers from Panama to Briarheath, with all its accompaniments of shame, sorrow, bewilderment and desolation, swept through her like a blast. Mr. Steinbach saw her shudder, and this gave force to her request.

"You have vacation now"—it was Easter—"and for once you can give a long holiday. Gertrude can stay with Mrs. Peters. I will see to that myself, and for the rest—"

She hesitated. She scarcely knew how to offer to pay his expenses, yet of course this was uppermost in her mind. She had business with her publisher, too, whom she earnestly desired to see, from the prestige of his letters and liberality, and altogether she felt impelled to go to that great city, of which she had caught but a tantalizing glimpse, when on her mournful way back from California.

San Francisco was a fungus growth of houses, reared in a day and night as it were, to suit the necessities of exiles; but New York was a reality, solid, slowly built, securely splendid, and she yearned to behold it face to face, with that sort of morbid feverishness of desire that comes sometimes to people dwelling in solitude, and impels them to plunge at once into the thickest whirl of civilization.

All this time Mr. Steinbach was looking at his best threadbare suit of clothes, and thinking very seriously whether he ought to disturb his little pile of gold-pieces—the savings of weary years—even for such a purpose.

He felt that the very greatest compliment had been paid to him that he had ever received in the whole course of his life. To be the escort of such a distinguished lady seemed a fabulous honor almost, and in the quick chivalry of the man's nature, he scarcely saw how he was to excuse himself, even at the risk of privation in the future, and the diminution of Gertrude's dower. Honestly, it never occurred to him that he was not to be expected to defray his own expenses, and when at last the proposition fell from Mrs. Howard's lips which terminated his mental struggle, he felt himself let down very suddenly to commonplaces from his high-wrought pitch of self-sacrifice, and recognized the truth.

She did, indeed, only want him as a convenience—he saw that now—a sort of courier. Yet he would go, even on these terms, to oblige her, and he bowed silently and gravely over her hand, in token of acquiescence, as he was taking his departure.

"I never could have entered into this music I am going in search of, Mr. Steinbach, with any other companion," she said, earnestly. "Mr. Sutton would have gone with me cheerfully on the same terms, no doubt. He is very kind and obliging, but it would have been a very different affair to me. Now, when we get to New York, you will indulge me a little further, I hope," and she glanced, not intentionally at all if significantly, at his ancient suit of snuff-colored broadcloth, white or rather yellow in the seams, after the manner of that color when on the wane, and cut in the most approved German fashion of thirty years past.

The suit was dear to him. In it he had loved his living and buried his dead, honored his Maker, and oh!

bathos in the extreme, visited his friends and acquaintances when he had them, and now this proud woman turned up her nose at it, as he could not have believed her capable of doing. He came very near seizing his hat and leaving her presence abruptly and forever, but he controlled himself, and he said only with cold embarrassment—

“I have no right to gainsay madam in any indulgence she proposes to herself. I hope she will grant me the same privilege and permit me to—to retain the habiliments of my honorable poverty, of which I have no reason to be ashamed. At my age I cannot begin to wear even such livery as hers. Yet I promise madam to do my best not to cause her the slightest mortification.”

“Mr. Steinbach, what must you think of me?” and the tears sprang to her eyes. “Livery! what question was there of this? Forgive me, my good, *dear* friend, that I should have set my own vanity for one moment against your manly independence. I will not affect to say you have misunderstood me, but I heartily beg your pardon, and believe me, no king on his throne could cause me more respect in his royal robes than you do, and will do from this moment in those well-worn clothes. I am ashamed that I should ever have conceived the idea of replacing them. I scarcely recognize myself in such a proceeding. Can you look over my levity?”

“You are a woman of a very great soul,” he said, after a pause, taking off his spectacles and clearing them carefully, as well as his throat, while he made his usual demure, old-fashioned bow, slowly and solemnly. “I will compromise with you, my dear lady. Now this is what I will do: I have for years cherished the cloak of

my dear Fritz—what you call Frederick—my only son, the father of my Gertrude. I have borne much cold, much inconvenience, rather than undo its fastenings and wear it on my poor shoulders. It was a present to him from a great nobleman, Baron Karle Van Horn, whose life he had the good fortune to save in battle. Fritz was but a foot soldier, yet he threw it around him at the moment, and they never met again, for Baron Karle was killed in the next charge. I tell you these details, thinking they may interest your good heart so open to sympathy and friendship; I tell them with regret, for it is not often I trust myself to speak of Fritz or his brave deeds, all buried now in the grave. You can conceive, perhaps, why I have held that cloak sacred which he himself rarely wore, because it was too fine for his condition, made of cloth like satin, braided, and trimmed with fur, faced with velvet, a princely garment truly! This was a sentiment with me; yet it is in this cloak that I shall appear, when I have the honor to escort madam, and I am glad to be able to prove my gratitude to her by such a small sacrifice. My hat I will renew; the expense will be small; and the poor old snuff-brown coat shall be hid from view by this splendid paletot, as also shall most of the shabby pantaloons."

"You shall do no such thing, Mr. Steinbach, but go just as you are. I would not have you do violence to one sentiment of yours on my account; I can so well conceive the feeling with which you cherish, yet put away that cloak," and she thought of that nurtured trunk of little garments and toys in the garret, closed four years before, and never, perhaps, by her hand to be opened again—thought of it with agony that almost stifled her.

"Madam is *too* feeling;" with a bow. "She will permit me, however, on this occasion, to indulge my caprice, a privilege to which old men are entitled, even from young and handsome dames. And now I must return to apprise my good margôt of my intended absence. In two days you say, madam, and you will see Mrs. Peters about Gertrude? I shall be ready." Bowing, he left in the sudden and sensible European style, which leaves no regret behind.

But what had Hester been about, to evoke the presence of that martial mantle?

Why should the sins of a doughty German baron, who chose to throw away his absurd life in bloody battle, be visited on a retiring American lady desirous of avoiding notoriety? Why should Elijah's mantle reappear at this stage of human civilization, instead of flying off peaceably in that chariot of flame that carried off its warlike master? In short, why should Mrs. Hester Howard run the risk of being mobbed in the streets of New York, because old Mr. Steinbach had a sentimental tenderness for the memory of his son Fritz, and through such a medium for a moth-eaten melo-dramatic garment such as the "Stranger" or Charles Moore's lackadaisical old father is compelled to appear in on the American stage in the "Transcript" of Kotzebue and Schiller?

These thoughts did *not* pass through Mrs. Howard's head, or if they had she would have repelled them with the heroism natural to that style of woman, and as a part of the penance due to Mr. Steinbach for her unfeeling reference to his wardrobe, albeit only made by the motion of a speaking eye.

But, for my part, I candidly confess I would just as

leave have been seen in public with the ambassador from Kamtchatka or Japan, or Lorenzo Dow, or Phineas Barnum, or the Captain of the Mackerel Brigade, as with that braid-bedizened, cavalry-overcoated, snuff-colored-legged, potato-nosed, and silver-spectacled old musical mountebank, noble and respectable as he really was, Thadeus Alonzo Steinbach.

It was well Mattie Lynne never got hold of this scene, or saw Mr. Steinbach, as, carpet-bag and umbrella in hand, and with a lofty consciousness of increased dignity, he seated himself, arrayed in his martial paletot, majestically in front of Mrs. Howard and Lora when they got on the Lynnesborough cars. It was long since he had felt at liberty to take a journey. Poverty controlled his motions as stringently as a pair of manacles could have done the feet of a prisoner, and he was sensible of a new sensation of elation, as he saw the panoramic landscape glide rapidly away, and felt the quick, jarring motion of the iron horse—a novelty and delight.

Mrs. Howard was afraid he would be garrulous on the cars, where she loved to dream, but emotion held him silent. He was a man of keen sensibility, and enjoyed everything as persons so organized only can do with intense and almost unreasonable consciousness.

After a journey of six and thirty hours, they arrived at the great city of their destination, and it was on leaving the cars that Mrs. Howard first observed the peculiarity of Mr. Steinbach's garment with a mixture of amusement and terror portrayed in her face that was ludicrous in the extreme. She dreaded lest he should read, as he had done before, through her expression, what was passing in her mind. She would have endured any

amount of torture rather than have wounded his "amour propre" ever so slightly again. Yet the effect of that Siberian garment was irresistible at that season, and was "winter lingering in the lap of spring" literally.

The consequence was inevitable, she knew. She felt it in every fibre, in every muscle. She *must* laugh, and that outright! Those only who have felt this morbid and hysterical inclination at a funeral, or in church, or in the middle of a deep tragedy, can conceive of, and pity her sufferings, as, clinging to Mr. Steinbach's arm, she felt herself convulsed by this elfin temptation, and gradually growing less and less able to resist it, until at last she quivered like a leaf from the repression of her internal merriment, shall we call it? Nay, sad and fatal sense of the ridiculous rather, more melancholy in its way than despair itself.

"She is affected!" thought Mr. Steinbach. "Poor lady! Perhaps her husband died in this city. She draws down her veil. She is in tears. I must not appear to observe her."

Fortunately at that moment he darted off in quest of a hackney coach, a sudden thought having shewn him that this mode of transportation would be more in accordance with Mrs. Howard's agitated condition than the publicity of an omnibus. And she was left alone, greatly to her relief, for five minutes, during which, to Lora's amazement, her mistress rang so hearty a peal of merriment that she looked about to see what could have caused it, and espying a monkey dancing on a hand-organ, immediately settled this fantastic animal in her own mind to be the occasion of so unusual a manifestation.

By the time Mr. Steinbach reappeared, Mrs. Howard was as grave as a judge—Mattie Lynne would have said as solemn as a bumble-bee—and willing to make any possible atonement to satisfy her own conscience. She even went so far in her self-abasement as to put her hand on the cuff of his paletot as they sat face to face in the hack, and say, "What beautiful fur this is!" which was true, or had been before the moths' invasion. "What do you call it, Mr. Steinbach?"

"Sable, madam—princely sable"—he answered, loftily, "of which some day my little Gertrude shall have a muff and tippet equal to, or superior to the good Queen Victoria's."

This nearly upset Mrs. Howard's wise intentions. She succeeded, however, in repressing her rising risibles, but firmly determined never again to allude to, or even glance at the ill-fated garment, if such power within her lay—not even with the pious wish of doing penance for the past.

This good and simple old man had concentrated all the vain-glory of his nature in this robe of reverence. Respect for the rank of its first possessor, affection for its second, had gilded it all over with a sheen of splendor and unapproachable perfection. What if the daring moth had rioted therein, or the fashion of the garment was strait and uncouth, or the braiding gingerbreadish, or the velvet threadbare? Was it not still rightly sanctified in his sight? and was it not a demon's work to mock at such virtuous simplicity? Thus reflected poor, contrite Mrs. Howard, as she suffered herself to be led, like a lamb to the slaughter, to the very most intolerable caravansary in that city of palatial hotels, be-

cause it was called "Faderland," or some such outlandish name, and was situated on a crowded thoroughfare, and kept by a worthy German, who revelled in the greasy delights of his national cuisine.

Mrs. Howard's publisher and personal friend speedily rectified this error, for such alone it was on the part of the right-minded Mr. Steinbach, and Hester felt that in her two days' abode in that pandemonium she had somewhat expiated her ill-timed levity.

Of this visit and its consequences it boots not here to speak. She found herself fêted, caressed, and honored through his kindness, as she could not bear to be, but was fain to appear reconciled to a state of things that drove her very speedily back to her retirement; not, however, until she had realized the revivifying power of the opera, and lapped poor Mr. Steinbach's soul in elysium by the frequency of her attendance in his society.

It was in returning home that her fate turned on one of those small pivots that so frequently determine destinies. And now the leaven of her life begins to work. Reader, will you forgive much detail and past digression, and patiently follow me to the final "lifting of the loaf?"

CHAPTER IV.

MAGNETIC CHAINS RECLASPED—AN IRON-MEED ANALYZED
—“HOME AGAIN! HOME AGAIN!”

A DAY and a half of railroad travel divided Hester Howard from her obscure home, when she left New York. It was on the evening of the first day that grievously oppressed by migraine she threw back her veil and clinging almost convulsively to the back of the seat before her, so as to maintain as immovable a position as possible, met the pitying gaze of a bearded man, who sat at some distance from, yet facing her, on the opposite side of the crowded and ill-ventilated car.

She did not recognize the glance that she had encountered, or him from whom it emanated, nor in her evident agony of pain could she resent it as an impertinence, but drawing down her veil she leaned back wearily in her seat, saying, as she did so, to Lora, “If I could sleep five minutes on your shoulder I should be better, but that cannot be; the motion will recommence in a moment and that is so distracting.”

The cars had stopped as she spoke, and her low, clear words were not lost on the ear of her compassionate and attentive observer, who had the fellow-feeling for her, suffering that none but the children of Sisera—still haunted by the periodical visits of the phantom of Jaël with her piercing tent-nail—can ever truly feel for one another.

In a few minutes more they were flying along the track again with renewed velocity, and the jar set up by the

machinery was thrilling her to the marrow. A wild sort of Runic rhymed chant, such as the Parcae might sing at their work, seemed connected with the clashing of the engine, insufferably mechanical and self-repeating, of which she could not rid her brain for a moment, and as the evening closed in, the cars were both dim and noisy—an incongruous mixture of the elements, certainly, since darkness and silence have been linked together as twin-born from time immemorial.

Hester Howard lay panting with pain on the shoulder of her servant, her eyes covered with her steeped handkerchief, her bonnet and veil thrown off now in the friendly gloom, and everything but suffering for the time forgotten. Lora had drawn off the gloves of her mistress so as to chafe her icy hands. Suddenly she heard a suppressed voice speaking near her in one of the pauses of the car.

"It is the hand of Hester Howard," it said. "I would know it among a thousand—and the ring is there!"

There was something exultant even in the subdued tones of the voice that spoke these words that struck the old servant, so that she remembered them later, and at the moment turned and looked fixedly at the speaker, now seated behind them.

The lamps of the car were being lighted, commencing with that above Hester, as if through some special injunction of her fate; and thus the revelation of the hands and ring had been made to the eyes of the stranger; (or it may be, old and long established acquaintance) in that new phase of pandemonium.

In a few moments more the suffering lady was lying locked in a deep and tranquil sleep in the arms of her

attendant, from which she did not awake until the rising sun threw strong, slant crimson rays through the open window beside her.

She awoke with a sudden sense of lifted pain, of renewed freedom, life and energy, inexpressibly delicious and invigorating. It was the new-born feeling that a truly strong and well-organized physique is conscious of in the cessation of suffering, when nature springs back at once to the performance and enjoyment of her functions with all the certainty and suddenness of an elastic bow just released from pressure.

She felt herself in the fullest sympathy with the aspect of awakening nature, with the clear, sharp, vernal air, the dew-besprinkled grass, the tender and vivid green of shrub and tree, the odor of clover-fields and lilac hedges, and apple-bloom, caught on the wing of the wind as the cars whirled rapidly on, and as quickly lost again.

With an audible thanksgiving to God for her emancipation from pain and her renewed power to appreciate the glorious gifts lavished so freely around her, she sat for a few moments unconscious of observation; then started back from reverie to reality, as she recognized the slight disorder of her hair and dress, and met scrutinizing eyes fixed upon her. With the aid of the contents of her travelling satchel and the glass of water Lora brought to her, she soon made her simple morning toilet, and by the time she had tied on her bonnet Mr. Steinbach was beside her. He, too (excellent soul), had just been aroused from his rosy Teutonic slumbers, and perhaps from mingled dreams of Mozart, Beethoven and the German cuisine, and now, arrayed in his royal paletot, was bending inquiringly and deferentially above her.

As to Lora, with the peculiar facility of her race for sleeping under difficulties, she had nodded quietly all night above her mistress, like a black holly-hock bending over a marble vase, and was now fresh, smiling, and fully awake as a bird that sleeps contentedly perched on a bough, instead of lying down in the more rational and human squirrel fashion on its bed of leaves.

But even as the bird reposes entirely in its erect position, doth the negro of true African descent find rest and refreshment from sleep, whether sitting or standing, as the case may be, with or without support for the irresponsible head. It is your thinkers and doers that need the pillow even more than the bed, and who suffer physically from brain weariness, as well as mentally; for it is a mortifying fact, that thought, the ethereal, makes the brain ponderous, even if it be not large, as action develops muscle in the body. So Hester Howard absolutely needed what was superfluity to Lora—rest for the exhausted head; and woke refreshed as from a pillow of down, from her long night's slumber on that faithful bosom, black, in one sense, as Erebus; in another, whiter than driven snow!

"I am so glad to find madam better," said the kindly German. "If I had not known otherwise I should have deemed her sleep the result of an opiate, so profound was it, so slumber-full."

The strange word did indeed express the true nature of that trance-like sleep, as no other better chosen, according to dictionary usage, could have so perfectly done. Those compound German words, even when translated, have great comprehensiveness, it seems to me; but they do not suit the genius of our tongue at all, and come in clumsily

enough even when appropriate to the idea, so that we do perfectly right to banish them after one trial, just as we turn Newfoundland and mastiff dogs out of our parlors, in which French poodles are welcomed with fond affection. But digression is my bane and yours, dear reader.

"Ah! here we are at the breakfast house just in good time," said Mr. Steinbach, rubbing his leathery-looking hands with honest joy, for the childlike creature of one idea at a time thought it no shame to be demonstrative, even in so material a matter as the prospect of a meal.

"Come, my dear good madam, let us not lose one moment; each one is precious when they limit us so sovereign-like as to time, drawing their watches on us like bayonets, and compelling us to hasten in that which should be most leisurely. But already time passes."

A shade of impatience was visible in Mr. Steinbach's manner as Hester lingered over a little pale-faced shabby-looking girl of twelve or thirteen, on an adjoining seat, travelling alone, with a small bundle beside her, and nibbling at a withered apple with a hopeless sort of makeshift appetite, that betrayed, even by its necessity, the insufficiency of the food it fed on.

"But you will be ill if you eat nothing substantial," said Mrs. Howard, "and no one will touch your bundle: come with me; it is perfectly safe on the seat."

"I have no money, madam," said the child, drawing back with an honest pride, and coloring to the roots of her tawny hair, so that every freckle on her peaked little face stood forth in bold relief, scarlet picked out with chocolate, until she looked like a lady-bug.

"But I *have*," said her friendly persecutor, "so come

along, and some day you shall do as much for some one else, if not for me."

So leading the little girl resolutely along, poorly clad and lamentably plain, went the proud, beautiful woman, in strange procession with the fantastic old music master in his royal robe, the withered negress in her red madras. Great hearts all! Jewels of price, though shrined in different settings.

The end of it was that Myra Clay went home with Mrs. Howard on trial as a handmaid (for her mission in a strange place and among strange kindred was to find service), and acquitted herself so faithfully that thereafter the current of their lives flowed together.

In the meantime Lora had recounted to her mistress what she had seen in the demeanor of a strange gentleman who took the seat behind them for a few moments the night before, while Mr. Steinbach went out to smoke his pipe, and repeated the remark she had overheard, and which clung with surprising and unusual tenacity to her memory.

Mrs. Howard mused for a while over the relation of the servant, strictly truthful as she knew her to be.

"Do you recollect to have seen this gentleman before, Lora?" she asked.

"I don't know, honey; I mout and I moutn't; all dem bearded men looks alike to me. Dis one had a long brown beard and mighty steady eyes, dat's all I 'member 'bout him at dis time. It wasn't Mr. Mulgrave, no, I promise you dat, nor Doctor Clarke, no, neider of dem two."

"Doctor Clarke, indeed! why, Lora, his beard, what little there was of it, was gray when we left California;

besides that, do you suppose *he* would have passed me by in that way and with such a careless remark? No, not for worlds."

"Dat's what I say, chile! *It wasn't* Doctor Clarke nor Mr. Mulgrave neider."

"True, true, that *was* what you said," mused Hester. "Who on earth could it have been? Some one that knew me, certainly, or pretended to."

"Maybe dere was some strangeness in dat man," pursued Lora, "for I seed him waving his hands onced or twiced over your head just so," imitating the gesture. "Den you fell fast asleep like you did in Californy, an' he bent clar over the seat to see your face, and jus den de 'ductor man came along and shouted out 'Spring station,' and he jumped up and took down his little red carpet satchel and was off widout a word, but seems to me I *has* seen dat man's face before and heered him speak, 'way off like a dream."

"I see it all now, Lora, perfectly," said Mrs. Howard, while a glow, like that the rising sun diffuses over the hill-tops, broke over her speaking face. "Lora," and she laid her hand on her old attendant's arm, and looked steadily into her eyes, "that gentleman was Doctor Mordaunt, I am sure; the same who came to me in my deep trouble in San Francisco, after—after, you surely remember, Lora, the circumstance of the *ring*?"

"Yes, chile, I does belebe it was dat 'netic doctor, after all done an' said, all dem black-bearded men looks as much alike as one pecan nut like de oder to Lora."

"Well, it can't be helped now, but I should so much have liked to meet Doctor Mordaunt again and speak to him, and perhaps I may still have that pleasure—*perhaps*," and she shook her head sadly.

What train of musing this suggestion gave rise to is of little moment here. Retrospection is a wondrous thing, and the birdseye view of memory in this sphere may give us clearer insight into the instantaneous summary of the mind at the final bar of judgment than any other faculty we now possess.

Suffice it to say, the incidents of this singular rencounter supplied food for thought to Mrs. Howard until she reached her home, where she found her sister Melissa ensconced with her crochet work and band-boxes, and Mr. Mulgrave awaiting her arrival with considerable impatience, furnished as he was with the accounts of his successful stewardship.

She had dreaded almost weakly the return to that empty, desolate house, for such it was to her, with all its refinements of comfort and surroundings of luxury. It was a relief to her feelings to see Melissa standing at the open door when she arrived, work and ivory needles in hand, uncongenial as she was, to receive her frigid embrace, and to hear that Mr. Mulgrave was at Briarheath on business which he was in haste to transact, and had just stepped down to Lynnesborough. All this would fill up the few first hours or days of her return, and prepare her to *desire* solitude again, after which she would slide imperceptibly into the old grooves of habit, measured and monotonous as these were. Mr. Steinbach flew off immediately, of course, to his home, to lay aside his royal robe and salute Margot and his granddaughter, both in dutiful attendance for the joyful occasion, and to partake once more, with a renewed appetite, of his own homely fare, of the brown bread and stewed prunes, and the various simple bakemeats of his national and individual cuisine.

It was several days before he came to Briarheath, for a slight attack of gout prostrated him ingloriously soon after his return, and proved to him not only the aristocracy of his descent, but the value of his poverty, as far as health and length of life were concerned, as well as the guilt of gormandizing.

When again he stood before the companion of his journey he was struck with the altered expression of her face. It seemed to him, in his tender and not unobservant simplicity, that some great change was passing over *her* he loved and revered so much, and he felt chilled and depressed by what he felt, rather than saw; for in all external observances Mrs. Howard was the same, nor was her health, seemingly, impaired.

In her solicitude for the comfort of others, her regard for the enjoyment of her guests, there was little difference; but the look of the eye was far-seeing and vague, the lips alternately too loosely parted, or too tightly compressed; the hands carelessly clasped together, or clenched convulsively; the cheek unsteadily and unnaturally pale or hectic. All this had escaped Melissa, but the dim eyes of poor old absent-minded Mr. Steinbach were sharpened by the instinct of affection to perceive and to compassionate, if not to comprehend.

What Mr. Mulgrave knew or observed it was difficult to arrive at; he had so much the trick of glossing over his real convictions by the specious manner of speech and manipulation habitual to him that he was fenced about at all points, and perfectly inscrutable to most simple-minded and straightforward people.

The truth was, the contents of a letter Mrs. Howard had received soon after her return home were weighing

heavily on her mind, and the very same information, differently imparted to Mr. Mulgrave, was now detaining him at Briarheath in an irresolute condition, contrary to all the laws of propriety or apparent necessity, and in defiance of his own interests.

An opportunity for explanation was by him most earnestly desired and even indirectly sought for on several successive days. At last this was afforded him by the temporary absence of Melissa Lynne, in dutiful attendance at the sewing society, patronized by the Rev. Elias Crawford, for the benefit of the Tywoppatee savages, for up to this moment no dragon of ancient fable ever kept more unfaltering watch over golden fruits than did this vigilant damsel above the intercourse of her hostess and the captivating attorney, who, to her admiring and unsophisticated eyes, seemed all that was desirable and attainable in man. At this point of reference to his fascinations it may not be considered inappropriate by the inquisitive reader to give a somewhat close description of one to whom we have hitherto alluded with little detail as to his outward man, but who occupies no unimportant position in our story, even as to its romance.

Mr. Mulgrave, at the time we write of, was about thirty-seven years old; his figure was tall and thin, and taken in connection with his style of face and dress very passable, although an accurate observer might have objected to the somewhat disproportionate divisions of its length, which accorded somewhat more than their due to the forearm and leg below the knee, signs of a recent civilization, we are told.

Yet Mr. Mulgrave's face was far from ignoble, despite these discouraging signs of form. His lineage was in-

deed respectable enough, as far as could be ascertained or demanded; his features, as well as could be seen, were regular and indicative of shrewdness and good temper: and whatever deficiency existed about the mouth and chin, if any, was completely concealed by his long, flowing black beard, fine as silk, and glossy, though without the slightest wave, as was the hair that still grew luxuriantly about his temples, though somewhat worn and faded on the top of his tall, narrow, and fanatical-looking head. He had those bright black eyes and close, white, even teeth that so often go together, and which possess so little individuality in themselves, though usually agreeable. His complexion was olive, and its pallor gave him an air of refinement in the eyes of those who look no deeper than the surface. His ears, carefully concealed by his straight, luxuriant side-locks, but which we take the liberty of peeping at for the benefit of our physiological or phrenological readers (I scarcely know to what department ears belong, unless, indeed, physiognomy will deign to accept them as a portion of the divine human countenance, modelled in the image of its Maker in the beginning of time, however degenerate now), were Midas-like appendages, coarse, pointed, and somewhat hairy, the one discord in the strain of his otherwise irreproachable physique; for Mr. Mulgrave was generally considered a handsome man, especially by very young girls—one of that class you pass every day in the streets of a large city and call “genteel” looking for want of some more definite term whereby to distinguish their mediocrity. Good-looking he certainly was, and *well*-behaved, if not precisely well-mannered. You had an indistinct idea (judging you by myself, of

course, my reader) that the restraint under which he seemed to labor habitually, upon close inspection, became him better than perfect freedom would have done; that abandon, in his case, *might* mean coarseness, and was a forbidden delight never, by him, to be with impunity indulged in, as indeed can be the case alone with people of true genius or the finest breeding. Self-consciousness is the skeleton at the feast of all who want these attributes, and if only for the privilege of its absence, let us bless good breeding and its progenitor, genius, from which cometh directly the delicious and suggestive word "genial," before which vulgarity flies aghast!

Yet there was a superficial ease about Mr. Mulgrave which delighted and deceived many; and the close and cordial grasp of his hand, sedulously cultivated, was adduced by his acquaintances as a proof of his warm-heartedness, as it really was of his worldliness.

Why grasp every hand alike? why not reserve the closer pressure for the friend beloved and tried, or well-approved? What social justice is there in this indiscriminate cordiality? Politeness is another matter, the simple social due of all we meet; but preserve me from the man who wrings every hand alike, with a stereotyped smile upon his face the while, which never reaches his eyes! Better, as signs of the inner man, gruffness, coldness, incivility even, for these may pass away on nearer acquaintance, as fogs disperse before the genial sun; but those glassy, indiscriminating natures can never be penetrated without suffering and disappointment on the part of the enterprising expectant.

I do not mean to class Mr. Mulgrave wholly with such as these. He was a self-made man, and had been

on the "qui vive" from boyhood, so that he had become wary as an Indian guide. He was capable of strong attachment, but his capacities in this line, by the very circumstances of his life, had never been developed. He had the money-changer's ideas of honor. In pecuniary matters he stood intact and firm. He took good care of his character; but magnanimity, generosity, forbearance were to him uncomprehended words, only to be found in the mouths of high-strung enthusiasts, and recorded on the graves of unsuccessful athletes of society! He repudiated all such "humbug" as he called it, and so he walked in one sphere unconsciously, and his friend, as he termed her, Mrs. Howard, in another, as perfectly separated in soul as though heaven held the last and earth the first.

A woman of Mr. Mulgrave's own calibre might have been very happy in his society, and very proud to bear his name, but these he affected not. He was ambitious in his love as in his worldly views. He was one of those not unusual persons whose tastes rank their capabilities—a class of people universally doomed to disappointment.

But enough of Mr. Mulgrave, who if common-place had glimpses of better things, and who, if not heroic, was at least enterprising and manly, and honest in externes, and who had the sense and decency to keep down his own defects, under strong bonds of outwardly observance, so that the satyr nature that was in him seldom came to the surface, and the grasping avarice of his mind never sullied his actions.

I ought to have left this man's life to tell its own story; perhaps it is the better way; but I have chosen to analyze him, principally for my own amusement, and I

hope my readers will put him together again, effectively, for theirs.

It is a poor business to dive to the bottom of the ocean and bring up nothing but sea-weed after all. "It does not pay," as the phrase goes. There were no pearls in poor Mr. Mulgrave's shallow depths, and it was scarcely worth while to go so far, and lose so much time, for such meagre results.

And yet there was one lava vein threading the mine of his existence that might, indeed, in time bubble up to the surface, and lie thereon forever, in the shape of a green and fertile island, shaped wondrously from ashes (as we know such things are shaped on material oceans), should the sunshine of the sphere above him ever fall thereon to change its barrenness to beauty and perfection, and this was *his passion for Mrs. Howard*.

CHAPTER V.

MR. MULGRAVE'S SECOND VISIT—FRESH RECOGNIZANCES—
MELISSA MEETS HER DESTINY.

MR. MULGRAVE entered the library in which Mrs. Howard was sitting with an open book before her (one page of which she had not turned in the last half hour), entered very quietly and gravely, and with a settled purpose written on his face. This was on the afternoon, it may be remembered, on which the Rev. Elias Crawford had drafted the ladies of his congregation to do duty at his sewing society, for the benefit of a

people who would greatly have preferred partaking of his flesh to his discourses.

They would not probably have set up the same pretext in his favor that saved the life of Madame Ida Pfeiffer, for the Rev. Elias was both cleanly and healthy, and in the enjoyment of a reasonable share of plumpitude. He deserved all the more credit, of course, for intruding his valuable aid upon them, distant and ungrateful as they were, and it is to be hoped may yet obtain the desirable distinction of martyrdom at their hands, which would no doubt be a highly gratifying circumstance to his biographer, if not to himself.

Mrs. Howard looked up in a troubled way as Mr. Mulgrave entered, placidly dropped her eyes again for a moment, then suddenly rose and closed her book resolutely, and laid it down.

"Won't you sit down a while, Mr. Mulgrave?" she said, "or is it too quiet here for you on this jubilant May evening? I feel half ashamed of being within doors myself, and this sweet-briar peeping in at the window has been wooing me to come out to it ever since I took my seat. I am a little stubborn, I believe, to be so insensible to nature's smiles and voices."

She was talking on he saw merely to fill the time, and preclude dialogue perhaps, or to be rid of him.

"Can she suspect my secret?" he thought, "and does she fear me? She *need not*! I know better than to kill my bird in the egg, and I can afford to wait—*wait* as I have often waited before for an object; yes, very patiently. My time will come." He smiled gloomily.

"I would join nature in her entreaties," he said, "and offer to accompany you in your stroll, had I not come

here this afternoon (finding you alone for the first time), in order to speak with you privately about your affairs; affairs which interest me deeply."

She was silent, but attentive.

"I have the transfer here for the first proceeds of land sales (those I accounted to you for by letter the other day are still in my possession), and I wish to give them to your own hand. At the same time I am about to venture to offer you, very humbly indeed, my counsel, as to the conduct of your money-matters, somewhat in jeopardy I fear."

"Has anything occurred to lessen the value of the stocks you purchased for me?" she asked, coldly.

"Nothing! *These* are safe, and the moderate income they afford you can only be alienated by your own act; but money uninvested is personal property, and belongs as such to the husband."

"I thought there was a contract to secure me in my property when the yearly stipend was agreed on. I supposed you cognizant of this."

"You will remember, madam," said Mr. Mulgrave, with quiet dignity, "that you waived aside all interference of mine on that occasion. I was not permitted then to make any suggestion, even for your safety. The lands are yours alone by the laws of the States they lie in, but in this State it is only through deed of trust that a married woman can be separately secured in her personal property. I thought of this when I took the liberty of purchasing the stocks for you in my own name, even at the risk of incurring your displeasure when disclosure should be made. I have made out the transfer for these stocks: it is here," and he laid it before

her. "Here, also, are the checks for the ten thousand dollars recently paid to me, for land sales, as your agent, and I would respectfully suggest, that these, like the first, should be invested in the same permanent shape, and that you would permit me, or Mr. Sutton, or any other honorable friend of yours, to hold this fund in trust for your benefit; otherwise, I fear—" he hesitated.

"What, Mr. Mulgrave? Speak out! These are truths that I must listen to, and that you are right to tell me."

"Otherwise, I fear," he continued, calmly, "that your property will be absorbed and wasted by one who has a legal right to do both. You understand me now?"

"I do, and I thank you for your well-intended warning; nor do I feel myself at liberty any more on his account than my own to decline your disinterested advice and offer. Will you be my trustee, Mr. Mulgrave?"

He bowed gravely for all reply.

"As to this last ten thousand dollars—" she hesitated.

"Ah, you have use for that! You are your own mistress, certainly; but I regret the necessity you are under for using this sum at this time. Your income so far is a small one. This would add greatly to your capital."

She rose, went to the window, broke off the branch of sweet-briar that nodded at her between the curtains, twisted it mechanically into a knot, tore away some of its leaves between her teeth, threw down the knotted branch upon the floor, then came back and reseated herself quietly, confronting Mr. Mulgrave, with a pale but resolute aspect.

"I will be frank with you," she said, "you deserve it at my hands; besides I would not have you think I repaid all your provident care with thoughtless, and it

would seem, under such circumstances, *heartless* extravagance. My husband needs this money. He has written to me from Paris. He is under arrest."

Mr. Mulgrave knew all this before, yet he was glad to be spared the pain of such communication; glad to be able to appear ignorant of the unpleasant news he had lingered at Briarheath to break to its mistress.

"You surprise me," he said, with such natural impulse that Mrs. Howard was deceived (in his peculiar code of morality, he did not call this *falsehood*, only necessary tact, or expediency). "When, madam, when did this intelligence reach you?"

"By the last packet, just after my return from New York. I am glad, now that the ice is broken, to be able to have your assistance in the safe transmission of these checks. I meant to have managed it alone, but for this well-timed conversation."

Mr. Mulgrave mused.

"I will tell you what I will do, Mrs. Howard," he said at last. "I am compelled to go to England in June. I will cross to the continent—the delay will be but slight—and convey this money myself to Mr. Howard, and see that the demand of the law be set at rest."

"No, remit it at once; he surely can attend best to his own affairs."

She spoke with a little asperity. Still Mr. Mulgrave persevered.

"There is only this about it," he said, clearing his throat, "he is surrounded with a gay and dissipated set of companions in Paris; this I have heard from unquestionable authority. Men who have preyed upon him, and will do so again, if the opportunity presents itself."

"It was always thus," she faltered.

He continued, as if unheeding her low-voiced, and it almost seemed unconscious, interruption of his remarks.

"Now should these *gentlemen* (we will call them so by courtesy) get wind of this remittance—fifty thousand francs seems a large sum to Bohemians—they will render the prison residence of Mr. Howard so agreeable to him that his checks will make wings for themselves before he knows it, and after such abandonment, you will again be called on for the means of his manumission."

"What you say is reasonable. Secure my husband's enlargement in your own way, and—and—believe me, Mr. Mulgrave, you insure my gratitude by all this foresight and truly disinterested kindness."

He saw that she was weeping and busied himself with the checks, which still lay upon the table, and the folding up of the paper of transfer, to give her time to recover herself before he said, gravely:

"This is but the beginning of the end, Mrs. Howard. Ruin stares you in the face grimly, unless you harden your heart against all such appeals in future."

"I know this, I know this," she rejoined, meekly. "But what am I to do? He is, or was my husband." She shook her head sadly, looking down on the floor, her hands carelessly clasped on her knee. Mr. Mulgrave thought her beautiful, sitting thus in her sad unconsciousness of any observation, and a flash, keen and almost withering, went forth from his quick, black eye to light upon her pale and troubled aspect, as he muttered inwardly, for the voice of the soul has its separate phases of speech and sound, like that which leaves the lips:

"Can it be that she loves him still? The wretch! her

destroyer, *but for me*. Nay, can it be that she ever loved him, shallow and base as nature herself has made him; even at his best, as far beneath *her* as the dust of earth beneath the clouds of heaven. Truly the heart of woman is a strange, mysterious thing. I would I knew! I wonder if Melissa could assist me in probing this peculiar nature to the root."

And even as he spoke the object of his latest reflection came noiselessly and smilingly to the door, standing open, as was that of the hall on that balmy evening, and suddenly peered in, still dressed in her walking-costume, white chip bonnet, lace scarf, lavender silk dress, as she had emerged from the street door of the Rev. Elias Crawford.

"Oh, you are engaged," she said, drawing back as Mr. Mulgrave bowed to her encouragingly, at the same time packing the checks into an envelope in a compact and business-like way, before depositing them in his pocket-book.

"Not at all, not at all; do come in, Miss Melissa. You know the old adage: I was just thinking of you, and give us the result of your evening's experience under the wing of the minister."

"Melissa, come in," said Mrs. Howard, rousing herself from reverie, "come sit by me," extending her hand to her sister. "Mr. Mulgrave, if you should think of anything more in relation to this matter, you can write to me about it. I believe I would rather not discuss it again. I do so shrink from all the details of business; and now let us hear what the Rev. Chadband has been saying to his sheep."

"Oh, sister, I wish you were less insensible to the merits of our pastor; he does so deplore your condition,

as well as that of Mattie. Do you know she had the impudence to tell him that if he could proselyte you his gain would be equal to twelve ordinary converts; that you had a great big soul that could be cut up to advantage."

"That was just like Mattie, certainly," and she shook her head, smiling as she did so, "like Juliet cutting Romeo up in little stars; but I never heard it before."

"Good—very good!" said Mr. Mulgrave, laughing his artificial laugh—he rarely permitted a natural one. "I declare I must know Miss Mattie better. I think she would suit me exactly."

"I didn't suppose she was your style at all, Mr. Mulgrave," said Melissa, a little sharply. "Dark people so seldom fancy one another."

Melissa, it may be remembered, was a blonde of the wax-doll order.

"Oh, I wasn't speaking matrimonially at all. A pretty girl of seventeen would scarcely lend ear to a plain bachelor of thirty-five; besides, as you say, Miss Melissa, or rather insinuate, we *like* usually our opposites in temperament," and he bowed quite significantly to the fair and fluttered girl. She simpered for all reply. Mrs. Howard looked from one to the other, somewhat archly.

A new light broke over her spirits. "What an admirable thing it would be for both!" she thought. "I never thought of it before, or I am sure I should have gone to match-making months ago. Henceforth, I will lose no pains in bringing them together. Poor Melissa will never have so good an opportunity again probably, situated as she is, and she is just the sort of woman to make a man like Mr. Mulgrave happy."

On the following morning Mr. Mulgrave left Briarheath, to return no more until autumn. He carried away a slight commission for books and laces for Mrs. Howard, and Miss Melissa charged him, at her sister's request and expense, to bring her a silk dress from Paris, of that peculiar color then new in the world of fashion, called "*Soupin de Singe mousant*," translated somewhat literally by our poetic man milliners as "*Monkey's last sigh*." She described it as a greenish, grayish, blueish, sort of sage color, which she thought would be peculiarly becoming to her pink-and-white complexion.

"Oh, yes, I know," exclaimed the astute lawyer. "Just the color of your eyes, Miss Melissa." He had no idea of offending her, but the result of his remark taught him a lesson never to be forgotten—one his profession should have taught him before. He managed, however, to soothe her offended vanity before he left her, and completed his triumph by sending her from Paris, a month later, a turquoise ring surrounded by pearls, bearing within the device, quaint enough, and very absurd it must be confessed, "*Œil de Mélisse!*"

The infatuated girl considered this offering as a mere premonition of what was to follow; nay, by the time of Mr. Mulgrave's return had wrought her imagination up to the pitch of a fancied engagement between herself and the idol of her fancy, and wore that indifferent and preoccupied air peculiar to those whose hearts have passed out of their own keeping.

It was not in those days so easy as it now is to prepay European letters in inland towns, and as Mrs. Howard wished to forward quite a bulky package to her friend

Mrs. Carisbrook, she requested Mr. Mulgrave to post it from New York.

"I will do still better," he volunteered. "I will carry it myself to London, and mail it thence to Derbyshire; but I did not know ladies wrote such voluminous letters as this to one another even at such a distance."

"It is very full of details of San Francisco, where she once resided and probably will again, though I sincerely hope she will divide her time with me when she finally returns to this continent."

"You were old friends, then?"

"Yes, very dear ones, too. She has done more to deserve my gratitude than any person living. I can never forget her kindness, her disinterested zeal. She first unsealed my intellect."

"Really! I should like to see this lady. Perhaps I may go myself to Derbyshire. Is she young and handsome, married or a widow?" and he laughed carelessly, but in truth his curiosity was excited.

"She is the grandmother of a girl of seventeen," Mrs. Howard replied. "Her age is somewhere between fifty and sixty; her beauty indestructible, since all she has proceeds from her great, noble, indefatigably benevolent soul, and now I fear your interest is destroyed."

"No, not at all; it was chiefly on your own account I questioned, knowing how solitary you must have been in that land of strangers, and away from your own family. There are few ladies of interest, I believe, in California."

"I knew no one in San Francisco, save herself, and she was thrown upon my hands in a very touching manner, when I stood most in need of friendship. She was lifted senseless from the street before my door, after an

overset, and was unable for months to leave my house; first from illness, the consequence of a broken arm, and later from stress of weather."

"And she was—" he paused as if to ask for the information he coveted.

"An English lady, highly cultivated and perfectly well-bred; a very rare woman."

"I never heard you speak of her before," observed Melissa. "Sister Hester, what makes you so reserved?"

"Circumstances, my dear," was the quiet answer; "but we are detaining Mr. Mulgrave in the hall, and he is impatient to be gone."

The package was sent to Mrs. Carisbrook in good condition, carefully enveloped and sealed, as it had been by the hand of the writer, and yet by some subtle process, best known to village postmistresses, the contents had transpired and passed into the subtle chambers of Mr. Mulgrave's brain. These enlightened him greatly on some points of mystery, and while convincing him of the sweetness of character and purity of soul of her he adored, showed him the slippery path, for such he at least esteemed it, she had been forced to tread at one period of her life.

"No wonder she resembled Mrs. Myrtis Lynne," he chuckled at his skilful detection of the truth, "and now I remember, she refused an introduction to me in her rôle of actress; to me, to all applicants as well, the manager assured me. Virgin snow is not more pure than that woman; but what would she think of me if she knew of this intrusion on her privacy? Well, well, her money is safe with me, and that is the principal matter with her just now. I feel, that serving her as sincerely as I do,

I have a right to know all about her, and some day, when she dispenses with that rascal, and the coast is clear, she shall know how I adore her, and how willingly I would give up every other hope on earth to call her mine. She will know then, too, how generous I have been in condoning her past—only to think, an actress!”

BOOK FOURTH.



In a word

Control's not for this lady, but her wish
To please me outstrips, in its subtlety,
My power of being pleased.—ROBERT BROWNING.

Oh, shrink not! I do nothing in the dark,
Nothing unworthy *Breton* blood, believe.

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES.

Read this at once and after this, and then
To breakfast with what appetite you may.

SHAKESPEARE.

BOOK FOURTH.

CHAPTER I.

THE SCHOOL AND THE SLEEP-DOCTOR—FRESH FUEL FOR FLAME.

THE school which Mattie Lynne attended—one famous during nearly half a century for the skillful training of teachers—was situated in the town of Ilium, and in the same community a very different institution was equally celebrated and useful. This was the infirmary of Doctor Mordaunt Trevor, who, although the graduate of a great Italian college, depended chiefly for his success in the treatment of the class of diseases he confined himself to ordinarily, on some inherent faculty that he could not himself define or even account for.

On this power he reposed with an earnest simplicity that might have had much to do in the first instance in persuading others of its existence, and which was borne out frequently by the results of his mode of practice. He was considered, by most physicians, either a fanatic or a charlatan ; but men of science bestowed upon his peculiar gift a very different consideration and estimate, and he stood among them as a living evidence of the great truth of electric affinity. One thing was certain, he must have owed his evident wealth to other sources than his practice, not lucrative enough, certainly,

to warrant alone his expenditures. Simple in his personal habits and apparently a man of few wants, his house was large and commodious, and his pleasure-grounds were extensive and kept with a fastidious care that must have been costly in its requisitions.

These last he threw open freely to the public, and his mansion was crowded daily with patients, many of whom he dismissed without a charge. In its large, well-ventilated, yet plainly furnished chambers, nervous patients were accommodated from time to time; the use of books and musical instruments was lavishly afforded them, and plain yet nourishing food set before them by cleanly and quiet attendants, who came and went as if impelled by some subtle machinery. For he depended much on quiet and regularity to aid him in the accomplishment of his cures, wonderful as these often seemed.

If he failed to relieve a resident patient he dismissed him or her without a charge; nor did he in any case make lodging a consideration at all. These invalids were his guests. Yet those who could afford it, and who gained relief by means of his remedies, were expected to pay a moderate fee; nor was he willing that any one should remain a day longer than absolutely necessary for the re-establishment of health beneath his roof.

This whimsical devotion to his own peculiar theories, even to the sacrifice of time and means, drew upon him the curious attention of the community. Like all absorbed persons, to this he seemed indifferent, if indeed conscious at all that such scrutiny existed; but had he made it his daily study to defy inspection, and set censure at naught, he could not more perfectly have succeeded in doing both, than through his utter abstraction.

His life, as far as could be known, was absolutely spotless; his temperance and placid energy perfectly marvellous; his command over himself only equalled by the strange influence he exerted over others. He accepted no invitations, gave none, yet those who called to see him were welcomed kindly, and found him simple, genial, diffident of self, and full of accurate and varied information. When questioned of his gift, he replied frankly, that he knew no more of its secret sources than did others; that he had been called to this mode of life as a vocation which he could not resist, and that in order to be useful to suffering humanity, he found it necessary to lay aside all private tastes, and turn away from all distracting causes.

Society, wine, excitement of every kind, he was necessitated to forego, or fail in his efforts to relieve suffering. Even the art he loved benumbed by absorbing his peculiar powers, and he felt himself obliged to surrender it, although gifted by nature with all a painter's fire.

No man, indeed, was ever less self-indulged or egotistical than he of whom it now behooves us to speak, and as a natural consequence of the absence of these qualities, none ever shrank more instinctively from the grasp of that natural inquisitor, the catechist of society.

He was called by educated men "a magnetic agent;" but the common people, among whom he moved habitually, and with grave earnestness, conferred on him the far more marvellous appellation of "The Sleep Doctor."

The power to command sleep! Have you thought what that is, my reader? It is something that approaches the God-like more nearly than any other gift. It is more absolute than courage, more noble than gen-

erosity, more potent than gold, more benevolent than charity itself. Within the breast of a man so constituted think what entire empire over self must first prevail! What infinite strength and calmness, what yearning compassion, what intimate sympathy with suffering must be his, who can compel repose for weary or fevered eyelids and breathe tranquillity above the restless couch of mental anguish!

No wonder, then, that through the streets of the city in which he lived straining eyes followed his footsteps, as the blessings he had borne to many disconsolate hearts were remembered, and the incalculable good to many weary frames exhausted by woful vigils.

I am led to speak of Doctor Trevor in this place because Mattie Lynne wrote eloquently about him at this period to her sister, Mrs. Howard.

A young schoolmate of hers, between whom and herself had sprung up a strong and sudden attachment, or rather intimacy, had died a month before, suddenly, of congestive fever, in the academy at Ilium.

She was the only daughter of her mother, who had arrived just in time to see her expire, and whose whole nervous system seemed to have yielded before the unexpected and terrific blow thus received.

Lovely and gifted, and healthy as a Hebe, life had seemed to belong to Laura Clarke as by especial right, and when she expired, after a brief illness of three days, only violent during the last few hours of her life, even those who were bound to her by no peculiar ties of affection, recoiled from the strange irrelevance of the decree with an almost indignant surprise.

It was a positive rebellion against the will of God

that pervaded the school from high to low, until reason and submission came to the assistance of necessity. But the mother was beyond these influences, and her tearless, sleepless, restless condition foreboded madness.

It was under these circumstances that her friends conveyed her to the abode of Doctor Trevor—asylum he would not suffer it to be called. He demanded this transfer of residence as one of the necessities on which depended her cure. The entire quiet and vigilance required by her condition could nowhere else be commanded; not certainly in the noisy hotel of the town, or the still more noisy academy of Madame de Winter.

Mattie Lynne went with her friend's mother in the carriage to the door of the doctor's residence. He met his patient here, and declined all further attendance on the part of her friends. Her servant only accompanied her at her own request, for she dreaded the ministry of strangers. Mattie Lynne described her haggard, wild-eyed, ghastly appearance as she entered the peaceful door of the commander-general of sleep, supported by the austere wizard himself.

She thought she descried Somnus waiting in the shadow, she said, but was not certain (the girl had a wild turn, we know, and made game of everything). She had a mere glimpse of the "sleep doctor," and he had impressed her favorably. Indeed she thought he looked like a very lovable sort of magician as well as respectable man, and had she a better chance she might set her cap and bells for him; but that would never be the case, probably, for on going to see Mrs. Clarke, a week later (she was summoned by this lady as her daughter's friend and from the natural wish of the bereaved to find sympa-

thy through the claims of the beloved dead), the doctor was not visible, though he permitted the call; nor in any subsequent visit had she seen him.

Mrs. Clarke had in the meantime recovered her equilibrium, and though still the most afflicted of mourners, was strong again to bear and to hope. The natural love of life had returned to her, and she desired once more to survive for her husband's sake and son's, both absent now in Europe; and, less selfish in her grief, had commenced to think as much of their sorrow and disappointment as of her own.

All this was right and natural, and all this had been brought about by the magnetic power entwined so mysteriously in the organization of Doctor Trevor. Mrs. Clarke slept, ate, rested once again, and bore a composed countenance, and whatever might be the continuance of her sorrow, madness had at all events been put away from her existence, and despair had succumbed to reason.

"All this, dear sister," writes Mattie, "recalls your own experiences in California too vividly to be agreeable, no doubt, but I am impelled to relate the circumstances of this case, from the thought, that should you at any time need such soothing influences again, you will remember Doctor Trevor. If I find an opportunity I shall surely tell him the episode of the ring and my dream, if only to prove my natural gift of clairvoyance. Perhaps, after hearing this, the doctor may propose to me—to travel around with him as a medium I mean—and so insure my fame and fortune both, as well as improve his own, which, however, is said to be ample. After acquaintance, there can be little doubt that a proposition of matrimonial partnership would ensue, which

would wind up the whole affair very like the conclusion of a second-rate romance.

"This much is sure. If I assume to be the head of a magnetic establishment, I shall charge board, and not receive broken-down gentlemen and ladies as guests for the love of science, or humanity, or from mistaken pride of position. The wish to play the Queen in the Court of Somnus would never govern me. Why, Mrs. Clarke's bill was perfectly contemptible! (She received it yesterday, by-the-by, with a notice to leave). Such charges let a physician down in the estimation of all rational persons. Bread and butter and tea don't cost much, it is true, and that is some comfort in discharging this ignoble bill!"

So ran on fluent Mattie Lynne, of whose progress, however, in the grand purpose of her life at that time, there can be little doubt.

She was acquiring, with an ease and pleasure wonderful even to herself, much valuable erudition. Her very handwriting had gained new character in the confidence of her own powers that had come to her since she had tested these, and her wiry and elastic organization enabled her to pursue her studies without detriment to her health. So far she had taken all prizes for composition and elocution with scarce an effort, but she was still behind many girls of inferior abilities to her own in those branches called solid, and was now deep in trigonometry and algebra and astronomy, trying to repair lost time, and prepare herself for the struggle.

"And is all this brilliancy and learning, the first natural to me, the second to be acquired," mused Mattie, "to be expended in teaching the hornbook to detestable

village brats? for of course I shall have to commence in that way, or play a subordinate part in a school or family, both equally distasteful to my sense of independence. Oh! for the lecturers' mantle, or the sandal of the actress, rather.

"Life—life! What discords mar your harmony!

"Now, if I had only had a remarkable and mellifluous organ instead of all this sense that burdens my brain, I might have made a fortune at once, by simply opening my mouth and giving voice like a pack of hounds after a fox; or if I could have cavorted about—both gracefully and shamelessly—in the ballet, and had a little more strength in my calves, a golden shower would have rewarded my active immodesty. If I could even write a book like sister Hester (*that* secret is out at last. I wonder what sort of a thing it is, by the way?) I might realize some money and position; but as it is—oh, me!" clasping her hands, and drawing a long sigh, "life is weary, weary work!

"Why was all the beauty, elegance, fascination and fortune in our family conferred on the eldest daughter of Judge Lynne, that California widow who does not value her gifts one jot, nor know how to take advantage of her position? Oh! the hearts that should be broken, the dresses that should be purchased, the horses that should be driven, the papers that should be bribed to puff any absurdity I might choose to commit or produce and call a book, and palm off upon the gaping public! Oh! the style, prestige and *éclat* that in her place and with her facilities should surround my every movement were I in her place! 'Mrs. Julius Howard goes to-morrow to Newport. We understand her diamonds and bathing-

dress are both for exhibition on Broadway;' or, 'That woman of incomparable genius and beauty, Mrs. J. Howard, is about to cast forth a poem on the ocean of letters that shall bear on its crested waves rich tribute in return to her expectant feet;' or, 'Mrs. Howard gives a ball this evening at her superb villa, where, like a second Zenobia, she lives in splendid seclusion. In our next issue we will gladden the eyes of our readers with a description of this superb fête,' etc. Ah! that would be life indeed! but to vegetate at Briarheath is a different affair altogether."

The sound of the school-bell rouses Mattie from her trance. All her energies are bent now towards the end of achieving honors at the July examination; then home and Briarheath will claim her during the vacation, after which, school again for a year, study, severe self-sacrifice, and then the struggle begins.

Ah! Mattie, who can foresee what one little year will bring forth? Not you nor I surely! No, nor Solomon upon his uneasy throne.

It was on the close of a sultry July evening, a few days before the examination at the academy, that Mattie Lynne, accompanied by Miss McClane, the drawing-teacher of the school, entered the pleasure grounds that surrounded the gray-stone mansion of Doctor Trevor, for a stroll under the spreading trees, and through the gay and carefully-kept parterres. They were attracted by the sight of some swans (recently introduced to the waters of a mimic lake) to turn out of the usual path, and to cross the closely-cut grass, as the shortest mode of reaching them. A gentleman was standing with his back to them as they approached, apparently intent on

his occupation of feeding the swans with bread-crumbs, for he did not seem to heed them, and was about to turn off unconscious still of their presence, having exhausted his store of food, when Miss McClane accosted him with outstretched hand :

"Doctor Trevor, is this the way you treat old friends, on your own premises, too?"

His fine face was all aglow in a moment, very calm as it was usually.

"Miss McClane! I am truly glad to see you. How could you doubt it?" and he shook her hand heartily.

"I did not for a moment, or I should never have spoken to you first under the circumstances. I was sure, however, you did not see me. This is Miss Lynne, Doctor Trevor, one of our recent but most promising scholars." He bowed for all answer.

"Your health is good just now I hope, Miss McClane," he pursued, scarcely glancing at Mattie. "Indeed I am confident of it from your changed appearance. You sleep well of nights, I suppose?"

"Yes, soundly; but at one time I thought my first slumber would be the eternal one. I have to thank you, you know."

He waved his hand slightly, interrupting her with an inquiry at the same time. "The picture, Miss McClane, how goes it? When shall I see it?"

"Whenever you choose to call, Doctor Trevor; but you have scarcely time for that, I know. I will bring it to you myself when it is completed. I hope you may like it. I cannot tell really whether it is a success or a failure, or a compromise between the two."

"There is no such thing as the latter possible," said

Mattie Lynne. "It must be, nay, it had better be, one or the other."

She spoke with that decision and vivacity natural to her, boring a hole in the ground with her parasol, as she delivered herself of this oracular remark, then planting it firmly as a staff, on which she supported herself carelessly, she gazed around.

She was dressed in a rose-colored muslin, with pink roses in the face of her white straw hat, and never looked better than so attired, and with her slight, elastic figure so gracefully poised.

Doctor Trevor for the first time really may be said to have looked at her. He was attracted, as quiet men are apt to be, by her animation and the somewhat daring spirit she evinced, and surveyed not without passing admiration her small, spirited, dark face, in which the eyes were the most conspicuous feature, and her slight, young figure with its expression of elfin grace.

"You are *the* young lady," he said, after the survey of a moment, "who came with Mrs. Clarke. How is your friend? I have been desirous to learn."

"So he saw me that day, after all," she thought, and smiled.

"Better—nay, quite restored, as far as health goes; her heart, of course, is broken, *ought to be*; she lost her only daughter."

"I know, I know. You have heard from her then since she left me?"

"Yes; she wrote to me from New York, whence she was on the eve of sailing to join her husband in Europe. They will never return," shaking her head prophetically and earnestly.

He was amused and even pleased with the condensation or rather with the energy of her speech.

"Do you know this last to be her determination," he asked, "or do you only feel inspired to prophecy?"

"Both," was the unexpected reply. "Her expressed intention will be confirmed by circumstances, otherwise it would amount to nothing."

"Your friend is a philosopher, Miss McClane, if not a clairvoyante," he said, smiling, as he spoke, a grave, slow, half-sweet, half-satiric smile, peculiar to those who think much and smile rarely, yet pleasant to behold.

"I really do believe I *am* something of the last," said Mattie, seriously, "and if you had time to spare might give you my reasons (as you are a connoisseur in such matters), if such they may be called, for this belief; but you are probably in a hurry—all doctors are, or pretend to be, that I have ever seen, except dear old Doctor Patterson, our family physician at Lynnesborough, who usually spent the day when he was called to see a friend, and insisted on seeing every pint, and ounce, and even pound, of his medicines administered."

"Lynnesborough must be a healthy place," said Doctor Trevor, dryly, "or your physician gifted with ubiquity, or perhaps his practice small, though its administrations would seem large; but however it may be, imagine me Doctor Patterson for the nonce, I pray you, and give me the benefit of your clairvoyante experience. Yes, every 'ounce and every pint of it.'"

"What, standing here? I should faint before I got through, from sheer fatigue, and so might you, for it is really a long story, with a preamble."

"Preamble and all, I must hear it; you know already

it seems that I am somewhat curious in that particular line (*that* only, I believe), although I have never ventured to dabble in clairvoyance. Walk to my house with me, ladies, and while you, Miss McClane, look over a package of new books I have received, any of which are at your service, Miss Lynne will, doubtless, for the cause of science, oblige me with her narrative; nay, permit me to make notes of it."

"On one condition I will do this—one only," said Mattie, plucking up her parasol at first as if preparing to accompany him, then suddenly hesitating and replanting it: "it is that you come to our examination on Thursday night. We want *all* the luminaries. Now you will have to promise this, or remain in outside darkness forever as to my power of clairvoyance."

"It will give me great pleasure to go," he said, quietly; "that is, if no necessity exists for my services at home; but I am *not* a luminary, nor am I in the habit of appearing among such, therefore you must oblige me by leaving me perfectly unnoticed if I infringe a rule of mine at your request."

"Certainly, certainly; I shall not bore you with my attentions at all (as I have bored your walk with my parasol, I perceive to my regret), and poor Miss McClane will have only time to hold up a meagre water-color painting (the prize production, probably), and shake it at you from afar recognizingly and triumphantly! My part of the performance will be to read a composition of my own—a very nice, elaborate mosaic indeed, made from many books, and so ingeniously fitted as to defy the closest detection that it is not all of a piece. After I get through with this I will go into a somnambulic state, if you bid

me with your enchantment, and tell you the secret thoughts of every one in the room."

"Ah! if you *could* do this what treasures you might command!" he said, shaking his head sadly, "what bribes would be offered you as the price of your silence and secrecy! I am sorry to say this, but I believe few hearts are pure to the very fountain-source. Some are, however, as I have cause to believe, but *these* are the exceptions."

They were walking on slowly as they talked, yet still at some distance from the house, when a low thunder-peal attracted Miss McClane's attention.

"We must go home at once, Mattie," she said, "we must, indeed, or be drenched, or claim Doctor Trevor's hospitality for the night, which he never extends except to sufferers (and then what would Madame de Winter say?) or take forcible possession of his barouche."

"Which, unfortunately, is not here," he interrupted, with an air of real concern, "so that perhaps it may be as well"—he hesitated—"could you not return to-morrow?" he asked earnestly.

"No, no, impossible!" responded Mattie. "I shall be busy up to the hour of the examination from this time. Besides that, I have made this silly communication a matter of too much consequence, perhaps; yet, to show you I *have* premeditated this, I wrote to my sister, Mrs. Howard, of my intention. She is a sort of third party in the affair, having been magnetized in California by some English quack or other, some years since, and benefited thereby; but good-evening; Miss McClane is impatient, I see, as is the thunder storm which is politely holding back, no doubt on our account. Fortunately we have

large parasols, and not very far to go. Be sure and come to the examination all the same."

"*I shall be there,*" he said, with strange emphasis, "and you shall recount to me then this vision of clairvoyance. You have scarce time to reach home, unless you hasten, before the rain storm. I feel this in my veins, and my estimates are usually pretty accurate as to electric influences. Miss McClane, good-by; you must call again to see me soon, and don't forget the picture! Miss Lynne, farewell."

He removed his hat, bowed low, and left them.

"What a difference in the tone and style of those adieux!" thought Mattie Lynne, as she stepped rapidly after Miss McClane, who, walking along with her long and regular strides, taxed the poor little feet to the utmost to keep up with her.

"Miss McClane is a gaunt, plain woman of thirty-five, and I am an elf of seventeen; that makes all the difference. Still what real genuine friendship he seems to have for her, and has testified by all he has done evidently to serve her, and what a knightly air and manner the man has to all; so proudly deferential! I could love that man, *worship* him. I feel it even after this one interview; but what would be the use? He would never fancy me enough to marry me; never! He has the heart of a stone-imprisoned toad, according to common report, and women are no more than ghosts to him, unless they fall sick and threaten to become ghosts in reality. Then his high and mighty contrariness goes to work to cram back the spirit in the unwilling flesh again!"

Mattie rang a peal of merriment here at the absurdity

of her own thoughts, which was not lost on Miss McClane.

"What can you be laughing at, Mattie Lynne, in the midst of this hurricane? The point of your parasol steel, too! It is really tempting Providence to exhibit such levity at such a trying time. But what *were* you thinking of, child, to laugh so heartily? Do tell me."

"The man we have just left."

"Surely, Mattie Lynne, there is nothing ridiculous about him—the best, the noblest, the stateliest man I ever knew."

"All this, no doubt; though I thought he came down from his stilts towards the last pretty decidedly, finding me so dwarfish, perhaps! Did you not remark the change?"

"He turned very pale when you were referring to having written to your *friends* of your intention to tell him of your clairvoyante experience. I remarked this, and could not, I confess, account for it. Just see that flash of lightning! It is terrific."

"Never mind, we are almost there; besides the chances are in our favor, a million to one. Such are the statistical reports, I believe. But don't you think the physician kindled up a little, grew more genial towards the last? His second acceptance of my invitation was very different from the first."

"It was imprudent in you to give it at all, Mattie. Nothing justified that invitation on your part—nothing."

"Yet we can each invite *one* person, you know; but that was not all. I wanted him to come."

"Why should you care for the presence of a perfect stranger? You showed too flattering an earnestness."

"Partly because he never goes anywhere, and it is a sort of triumph and distinction to have him, and partly"—she hesitated—"because I *fancy him!*"

"You are very frank. Take care how your fancy runs away with you in this case. I will tell you before hand, it will be of no avail. He will never more than very slightly fancy you." Miss McClane spoke coldly, almost reprovingly.

"Do you know these things by experience?" asked Mattie, bitterly.

"I do," was the unexpected and almost grim reply. "Yet, mark me, Mattie Lynne, not from my own case comes this experience. No. God knows how purely and entirely gratitude and esteem have governed me in my feelings toward that noble *gentleman*. But there was another less guarded at every point, far more beautiful, more attractive, more gifted than either of us two; dearer to me than any one can ever be again, who *fancied* Doctor Trevor, and the end of it was—despair! But he was not to blame; nay, I doubt if he ever knew her feelings entirely, he is so unselfishly self-absorbed, a contradiction as it would seem; but if you knew him better, you would understand me, Mattie. Still another paradox. I know not a purer or a more dangerous man than he; beware of him! He cannot help his gifts."

"No need of such warning. Yet I thank you all the same," and Mattie laughed merrily. "Why the man is old enough to be my father almost. When I grow love-sick, it will not be for quackdom and age."

"A man of six and thirty is in the prime of his life and manhood; besides, there are few men so unconsciously attractive as Doctor Trevor. His face is among the

noblest I have ever seen in or out of marble, and its expression rare. An aged quack, indeed!"

"Yes, he is very good-looking. (How it darkens!) Few men have so well-knit and graceful a figure and such a straight leg. I remarked that first of all. I always do. (I declare, that flash was almost blinding!) By-the-by, what became of that lady you spoke of in connection with him?"—this last spoken very carelessly.

"She is dead."

"Did she die of disappointed affection? *Do* tell me, Miss McClane. I ask from real interest, not vulgar curiosity."

"No—no, not at all. She was a happy married woman and the mother of several children when she died. Her phase of melancholy had passed, a wholesome reaction had occurred; yet for years before she was utterly blighted by this misplaced affection. It was through Doctor Trevor himself that she was restored."

"Strange—strange! I suppose the idea is this: he first wakened her emotions, then laid them to sleep again at will! The man is unconsciously a homœopathist!"

"Her nearest friends knew nothing of the cause of her melancholy. I alone was cognizant of it. It was at my urgent suggestion that she was again conveyed to the residence of Doctor Trevor, and placed under his treatment. If that honorable man suspected the cause of this new alienation of mind, or rather of energy and interest in life, he never betrayed the slightest suspicion thereof. She passed through his hands, as others have done, unscathed, and left her malady and her unhappy passion both behind her. When she quitted his house for

the last time, friendship alone survived. The only peculiarity I noticed was that he insisted upon it that *I* should remain with her on this second visit, in the capacity of nurse and assistant. He had treated her before for the nerve of the eyes only. The stress he laid upon this arrangement, as I have said, was the only indication afforded of his possible suspicions to me, to her, or any one. It was in this way that I came to know him well, and esteem him highly, and became possessed of a few of the secrets of his life, as did she, which exalted him still more in my opinion and even hers.

"Later, when I was ill with nervous fever, through secret struggles of feeling, united to overtaxed powers (we had been well off once, and my father had failed and died, and teaching was new to me and very irksome then, even more than it is now), he ministered to me night and day with untiring fidelity, and saved my life. Now, Mattie, you know what ties bind me to Doctor Trevor. Believe me, my advice to you is entirely disinterested."

"I do believe it," said Mattie, with some show of real feeling, "and I scarcely deserve that you should have condescended to make such explanations to disabuse my mind. Do you know that I think you deserve, more than any woman I have ever known, just such a husband as Doctor Trevor? It seems to me that you two would suit exactly."

A faint glow for a moment flickered over the sallow cheek of the teacher, whose veil thrown back revealed every change of her plain yet regular face, and her clear, gray eye was bent forward with strange steadiness on space.

"My dear girl," she said at last, "I thank you for your good opinion. You do not mean to mock me, I know, but you do this unconsciously. Dr. Trevor has naturally the most artistic eye I ever knew. Such persons adore beauty; nay, demand it as a necessity of their daily life. On this ground alone I should never have suited Doctor Trevor. Let that subject drop now forever, I beg."

She laid her hand lightly on the arm of Mattie.

"And on that ground I should certainly be minus also," rejoined Mattie, adding inwardly, however, "there are other sources of attraction, thank goodness, almost as powerful, though a little more troublesome in practice, that I am *young* enough to bring to bear. Good and admirable as Miss McClane is, she is no reader of the heart of man, no match for a born coquette."

Ah, Mattie, there are men who are above coquetry. Nets spread on the ground catch partridges, not eagles; or even if entangled for a moment in their meshes, these last do but have to spread their strong, brave wings and burst them to shreds, while they soar away majestically and unharmed to seek their native mountain heights and fan a purer atmosphere.

They walked on in silence and slowly, until they reached the gate of the small enclosure around Madame de Winter's academy. It was raining steadily now, the wind had died away and the muttering of the thunder was dull and distant. The lightning flashes no longer set the heavens in a blaze.

"What a grand thing a storm is, and how I love to meet it face to face! It is life-giving, inspiring! I feel like a new creature when it is over," said Mattie, as she opened the gate.

"It leaves me perfectly collapsed, on the contrary," said Miss McClane. "I suppose the storm drains me of what little electricity I contain. This is the philosophy of the matter, no doubt; while you, who are overcharged, lose some of yours, and through its influence thus experience relief. That vision of yours convinces me that you are a natural medium, a lightning spirit, and so much the more for that, under the dominion of magnetism and its agents. Prospero and Ariel, remember!"

"Ah, I understand you," said Mattie, with a curl of scorn on her young, red lips. "You may be mistaken, however, in your references and comparisons. The lightning spirit may command the magnetic agent, for all you know, reversing all former precedents. There is something beyond animal attractiveness very potent in this world at this time. The power of will and intellectual effort may, it is conceded, subdue physical forces, and baffle even electric currents. For my part, I defy magnetism, and intend to resist all its subtle encroachments to the death."

They separated in the hall; Miss McClane to go to bed and have a cup of tea, for she was drenched to the skin, and threatened with nervous headache; Mattie to make a fresh toilet (for it was reception evening), and shine like a glittering fire-fly, eclipsing all the plainer insects around her in the parlor until midnight, then read over and touch up her composition, and recite some passages of it aloud, to try the effect, with her head thrust out of a third story window, for fear of disturbing the slumbers of her schoolmates or teachers, and with the sailing moon and stars overhead for all audience and spectators.

"It will *do*," she said to herself, as she blew out the

candle, and glided into her narrow, white bed, light and noiseless as a phantom. "There are passages in that paper that will bring down the house, and make that old 'sleep doctor' wink like a newly-aroused owl. He affects the impassive, that is plain; but I will bring him out of that before I have done with him! There's Parthenia Forbes; her composition is superior to mine. I would swap with her, as horse-traders say, and give boot willingly, this moment; but in the way that she will read it, frightened to death, and dolefully as if she were officiating at her great-grandmother's funeral, with a snuffle in her voice, and eyes blinded and bleared with unmeaning tears, and a large white handkerchief in her hand, which she will flourish between times like a banner, the whole effect will be lost, or ridiculous. But there is poetry in that girl, and in me *not a bit*, and that's just where I'm superior to her.

"As to being frightened in anybody's presence, I can't conceive of such a thing. Providence never made this scoop in my head for nothing," putting her hand on the sink whence her mound of reverence should have risen. "Besides, I have yet to see any person's *worth* being frightened before. I told that man the truth, when I said I could lay bare people's motives; *I can*. It is a natural gift of mine. No humbug about it. I wish I couldn't, then I might indulge in diffidence before the stuck up, hero-worship, and all that sort of thing, and believe lies and false pretences, as it is sometimes convenient and even pleasant to do; *but I can't*.

"Now McClane is good and truthful; sister Hester is pure gold; that man, well—*moderately* so. I have not quite made him out yet. There *is* something a little

inscrutable about his composition, and that is what interests me; but it will all be clear soon. Then what a face he has! Ye gods, what a face! Raphael looked just so, as I imagine him—St. John, perhaps. The devil may be behind all that, though, twisted up with this gift of his, '*nous verrons.*' Really I cannot pray to-night, there is no use trying. I consider it sinful to pray 'agin the grain,' as old Lora says. Therefore, with many profound excuses, I commend myself most humbly on this occasion to the kind indulgence of saints and angels, and beg leave to withdraw without further ceremony into the realms of Somnus, and drop the curtain."

So saying, Mattie nestled her face, after a childish fashion she had never given up, into her pillow, crossed her hands kittenwise above her head, and fell to sleep, saints and angels fully satisfied, no doubt, of the politeness of her intentions.

CHAPTER II.

THE SOPHISTRY OF SELFISHNESS—THE GARDENIA.

THE strong crimson rays of the glorious sun of summer in its solstice aroused Mattie Lynne from sound slumber the next morning, and she rose from her pillow at the summons (for which she had purposely left open a window shutter), fresh and vigorous as a dryad, after the drenching experience of the evening before.

At breakfast she missed Miss McClane from her usual seat behind an immense mound of sliced and buttered

bread, which it was her province to dispense, while Madame de Winter presided in state at the coffee urn and surveyed her forces, like an experienced general, behind this intrenchment or chevaux-de-frise of Britannia ware.

"Where is Miss McClane, after her wetting?" asked Mattie of her next neighbor, a large-eyed Southern girl, full of quick sympathy.

"Sick with nervous headache, for which there is no immediate relief," was the mournful answer.

"I could cure her if I would," thought Mattie; "but I shall keep my own secret, as the process makes me feel very much like a boiled rag myself, and I cannot afford to lose my vitality just now; I cannot, really. I want it for a purpose, and I remember just how I used to feel when I got through with manipulating mother. As to being shut up this glorious July day with smells of camphor and vinegar and the groans of Sisera under the tent-nail of Jael ringing in my ear, I cannot think of it for one moment; a day on which the bees and the butterflies are abroad in full gala costume, and the very motes are dancing Scotch reels in the sunshine. These are my affinities, and to them I go.

"I have no turn for martyrdom, decidedly. By-the-by, I wonder why she doesn't send up for the magnetic doctor, her friend. I know I would, if I had half so good a chance. Only I am an ugly little thing in bed, and must always be up and dressed to make any show at all. Gowns and caps are not my style. I am like the Greek orator, great only in action, action."

And she frisked joyously about for a while in the pure delight of her young, healthy organization, in and out of the portico, until even she was weary.

"I believe I will venture into the prison-house, just to make a suggestion. It would afford me such a golden opportunity if the 'waving man' should arrive to-day on his errand of mercy. I could be found lingering on the staircase, so anxious about a sick friend, and it would be so interesting! I will try it."

Mattie entered Miss McClane's darkened room accordingly, about ten o'clock that morning, on tiptoe, very quiet and sympathetic, and groping to find a chair. She was greeted with a groan like an unsuccessful orator.

"How do you feel, dear Miss McClane? You don't know how sorry I am to see you thus. I can't realize sick headache, but I know it must be dreadful. Can I do anything for you?"

"Nothing—nothing; unless, indeed, you would press my temples for a moment, they throb so."

"And make a rag of myself," murmured Mattie, "to make a vampire of you! Now really this is asking too much" (aloud), "my hands are so warm, dear Miss McClane, they would only aggravate your suffering. Would not a cold cloth suit your condition better? I will wring out my pocket handkerchief in ice-water—"

"No, no, Mattie; that would kill me. My head is cold; your soft, warm hand would be the greatest comfort. Let it lie on my forehead a while."

Thus appealed to, Mattie could not refuse, consistency was at stake; but the hand was very soon removed on some trifling pretext, and Mattie prepared to take her departure.

"I must go now, dear Miss McClane, I have so much to do" (a conventional fib not very hard to tell in most cases). "But why don't you send for Doctor Trevor?"

He could assuage your pain, no doubt, and lap you in unconsciousness, if not Elysium itself."

"I know he could the first, and would most willingly, but I never abuse kindness. He is much engaged, too, and requires rest and time whereby to recuperate his powers. If I were ill I would send unhesitatingly, but this paroxysm will pass off of itself, great as the suffering is. Besides, Mattie, I know that he often absorbs these headaches into his own system; no Elysium to him, I assure you, and I have too much regard for him to occasion him unnecessary pain. It is not just that he should suffer my portion."

"This is very heroic," *thought* Mattie, "and exactly my own private opinion," but she *said*:

"It is his business to do this, and I should not take that view of the matter at all in *his* case. He sets up for an absorbent, a sort of mad-stone, and an absorbent let him prove himself. I have a great mind to put on my bonnet and go after this medical sponge myself."

"Do no such thing, Mattie Lynne, if you value my esteem," said the sick woman, in a sharp and querulous accent, strangely at variance with her situation and previous tone of voice. "There, you have made me worse, unintentionally I know, dear, but I am better alone, I believe. Come back when I am relieved. I *must* be still."

"Now my weary lips I close,
Leave me—leave me to repose,"

murmured Mattie, as she turned away from the bed. "Here endeth the descent of Odin."

At twilight, when the weary pain was lifted away from the sufferer's brow, Mattie came softly back, with a bouquet of exquisite flowers to lay on her pillow.

"Doctor Trevor sent them to us," she said. "I suppose he thought we could divide them amicably, but I only took one, all the rest I bring to you. Are they not delightful?"

"Truly so! What flower did you retain, Mattie?" with a faint huskiness of voice.

"Only a gardenia! I thought it would look well in my dark hair to-morrow, and it keeps fresh longer than the rest. Besides, I do not much care for little odorous weeds, such as this bouquet is chiefly composed of, though I know you do. Heliotrope and mignonette are foolish sentimentalities, I think, in the world of flowers. The smell is an ignoble sense after all, but the sight is god-like."

"It surely is the king of the senses, still none could be dispensed with very conveniently. I for one have a perfect passion for sweet odors."

"It is well I brought you the weeds then. Now for the doctor. He sent his barouche and card to-day, with a pencilled request that we would drive out in his carriage, as he could spare it to us. I wonder he didn't add umbrellas; don't you? as an additional Hibernianism, as the law was once, and with it the necessity for *his* ancient barouche."

"He meant kindly, Mattie; he is not a man of the world, you know, as the word goes. He wanted to prove to us his sincerity yesterday in regretting the absence of his carriage. His patients use it all the time. He goes about himself in a cabriolet, a clumsy French affair, for which he has an affection."

"Well, I supposed as much, and gave him credit for good motives. You are an incorrigible literalist, I declare, Miss McClane." There was a moment's pause. The invalid broke the silence.

"You sent the barouche away empty, of course, Mattie?"

"Not at all. Parthenia Forbes and I went driving in it by Madame de Winter's permission, and we met Doctor Trevor, out visiting his patients, and he alighted from his cab to speak to us, and has promised us a breakfast after the examination, and you are to be invited as lady patroness, and one of his sick tabbies is to come likewise to play propriety, and I am to tell him my vision, which you know all about already, and which so startled sister Hester, and which you, too, credulous creature, believed."

"It was surely true, Mattie Lynne," said Miss McClane, gravely. "You would not dare"—with severity.

"It proves its own truth," interrupted Mattie, carelessly, "from the fact that I knew nothing of the circumstances before, and sister knew that I did not, as did old Lora."

"Then why, by your uncontrollable levity, cast a doubt on your own veracity?"

"What is the use of bells to one's cap if it may not be shaken occasionally? I like to make you open your great gray eyes, that is all. By-the-by, I think Doctor Trevor and you are alike in that feature. You have both such a steadfast gaze."

"Only when we look inwardly, Mattie. That is the expression of reverie. When people look at you thus they never see you; their regard is introverted."

"Thank you for the information. Then the doctor was looking at his own viscera to-day, when I thought he was observing me attentively. Once I heard him murmur, when so employed, 'not the least resemblance,'

and I supposed he was contrasting me favorably with Parthenia Forbes, until you explained his habits. Now I see plainly that he was absorbed in internal comparisons. Liver and lungs, perhaps."

"But never spleen, Mattie, whatever else he may be considering. He is the sweetest-tempered man I ever knew."

"All cold creatures are meek and mild, you know; even sister Melissa gets up a reputation of that sort on the strength of her lymphatic temperament. By-the-by, such people vampirize me and steal my fire. It is like filling up the vacuum, you know. Still,"—soliloquizing evidently—"she is a thousand times better than the viperish Sophia Sutton, my sister, Miss McClane, at your service."

"And you show them up in this manner! Believe me, you are wrong, my dear pupil, and your affectionate heart will rebuke you when this conversation is over."

"My affectionate heart—God save the mark!—will certainly do no such thing. Yet I am capable of affection, Miss McClane. I love you, and I love sister Helen, and I could love others, but not those women. Some sort of a sticking-plaster attachment there is, of course; the attraction of adhesion that keeps all families together, else would they wage open war in most cases. I wish you knew sister Hester; you would like one another, I am convinced. You must go home with me for a visit. It would delight her."

"Ah, would that I could! but I have still a few who love and watch for me in a distant home, and I would not disappoint them to please Queen Victoria."

"That is the way every one ought to feel, I know,"

said Mattie—a momentary hesitation was observable here —“but as to those women, I find them equally detestable, and brother Sutton not much better, though he is a good sort of sneaking creature enough, hen-pecked and goose-pecked, and withal a slave of mammon to a degree that amounts to fanaticism. He is not one of your hypocrites who fall down at the feet of rich men, and then deride them as soon as their backs are turned; but he has an honest awe and adoration for all such golden calves that amounts to hero-worship, and would have satisfied Moses and Aaron themselves had he been one of their congregation. King Midas would have found him a most loyal subject, and had he found out about the asses' ears he never would have gone babbling to the reeds about them, but regarded them with mysterious reverence, as a mark of superiority.”

“Oh, Mattie, Mattie, how you do run on!”

“Yes, yes; I am very absurd, no doubt; but the fact is, this matter of kindred love is a vexed question that perplexes me. ‘We accept our relations, but we choose our friends,’ was the saying of some wise person, I forget who, whom, was, no doubt, trying to find good reasons for detesting his own relations and liking those of other people.

“Good-night,” and she disappeared.

CHAPTER III.

THE ORDEAL OF THE BURNING PLOUGHSHARE—PARTHENIA
FALTERS—MATTIE PREVAILS.

THE examination at Madame de Winter's academy was a very brilliant affair, and "went off splendidly," as everybody said, a judgment which the morning papers confirmed, through the experience of their two rival editors, who came in just before supper, and went out immediately afterwards.

All the "luminaries" of the town of Ilium were there, from the fashionable Mrs. Jarvis and her showy daughters, and sneaking-looking, little, rich, dyspeptic husband, down to the meek, dried-up French dancing-master with his family, who had lived, poor man, so long in this country that he had forgotten his native tongue, without acquiring any other, so that he found himself almost as badly off as the Peter Schlemyll of German story—a man without, not a shadow, but a language.

There also might have been seen Doctor Spartacus, the distinguished divine—tall, commanding, looking solemnly urbane and wholly artificial; and Mr. Jau Jeune, the celebrated naturalist, who found his favorite pastime in impaling insects and witnessing their dying agonies, and who had consequently acquired a fiendish expression of face; and Mr. Sinclair, the young poet, undergoing the torture of self-consciousness as the penalty of his fancy, and overcoming native diffidence by an affected air of haughty Byronic indifference. Madame Barette was there also, the delightful foreigner

whose receptions were the talk of Ilium, and who spoke six languages, all imperfectly, but still sufficiently to be understood by the aid of pantomime, and who wore a black wig curled in the neck, and teeth like saucers, and peony-colored rouge, and pearl-powder in patches, and an imitation emerald necklace set in Etruscan gold, and was short and fat and vociferous and outwardly vulgar, and still perfectly enchanting, because of her naïveté, good-humor, tact, and common sense, and entire want of pretension and selfishness.

She had been a second-rate singer everybody knew, and made her money honestly at least, with her melodious pair of bellows, and she had cherished her old paralytic husband tenderly to the last day of his life, and lamented him heartily, and then wiped her eyes, and bought herself a pretty villa at the edge of Ilium, because "ze air was zo healthy for de longs," and removed thither with her delicate son, and poodle and foreign domestics, all of whom she petted and spoiled (as she did every creature that ever entered her gates), and thus established herself as one of the institutions of that ancient town, which boasted many other far less amiable oddities.

Finding that society was slow to solicit the honor of her acquaintance—as was commonly the case in that fastidious community, when any peculiar prestige attached to its new-comers—she played the part of Mahomet, and went to the mountain that refused to approach her, and issued cards first for a grand "fête champêtre," in which she introduced the new feature of an archery, so that curiosity drew a crowd together, and later gave invitations for receptions, which were really

very agreeable, free-and-easy, and successful affairs, inexpensive as they were.

To-night there was quite a little "émeute" in the crowd, because her lapdog had followed her to the entertainment, and made his way resolutely, and with many "yaps" and "snaps" at all obstructing heels, to the feet of his beloved mistress. It was very funny to see Madame Baretti disengage herself from the arm of her lame son (the poor fellow had been a martyr to hip-disease, but was relieved as far as pain went, and enjoyed society as none but foreigners can do for its own sake, so that his mother convoyed him everywhere, and supported while she appeared to lean on him).

It was very funny, I repeat, to see her forego this maternal office for a moment to seize the little shaggy intruder, and fold him tenderly in her arms, while she addressed him with affected displeasure.

"Zou naughty little Zylphide! Who did invite zou to leave de bed were zou was sleeping zo zweety ven I left my room, to trouble all dese ladies and gentlemen vith de zite of dat ugly little black face 'mug,' vat you call? Madame de Wintair"—raising her voice so as to be heard by that majestic lady, then moving in her orbit in the direction of Madame Baretti—"vat shall I do about zis vicked little dog, who has intrude on your elegant assembly uninvite? Ve place ourselves at your mercy, most sovereign lady." Bowing low. "Mus ve go home vid dis little saucy interloper, or vill you graciously permit us to remain, on de condition dat ve hold him turns around, Guiseppe and myself, all de evening, zus, safely in de arms?"

"If you can insure his silence, Madame Baretti, we

shall be perfectly willing that your lapdog shall remain; but you know, dear madame, how very awkward it would be should he bark in the wrong place; how absurd, indeed, it would render our exhibition. Suppose I supply you with a covered basket and a saucer of milk, a pillow even for his accommodation, and have him transported?"

"Oh, nosing of de kind, I beg!" interrupted madame. "It would break Zylphide's heart, vid de most profoun' mortificate to find herself in such limbo in a strange place; bettaire we should return home and forego your delightful soiree altogeder! But your smile reassures me; ve remain! Now, Zylphide, be on your very best behaviour, petite vagabonde."

Madame de Winter bowed courteously and passed on (a stately dame, arrayed in black satin and a white turban, adorned with a bird of paradise plume). She was about fifty-five years old, tall, thin, fair, well preserved, as the word goes, and wore gold-rimmed spectacles habitually across her Roman nose.

Her manners were strictly conventional, consequently faultless as to common estimates. She was, what is not so rare as people think, an excellent, unexceptionable worldling. Yet it was difficult for the human mind so far to penetrate the arcana that surrounded her as to imagine what she might have been in her pristine and natural condition.

Amid all these worthies, and many more that we shall not mention here, and despite the dense crowd, the hawk-eye of Mattie Lynne soon singled out the object of her peculiar interest on this occasion. She saw him when he came in, quite alone, and certainly very distingué-looking. She saw him when he shook hands with Madame

de Winter and Miss McClane, and discerned him clearly out of the corner of her eye seated partly behind a pillar watching her while she was reading her composition, which she knew perfectly by rote, and therefore scarcely looked at at all.

Yet, when later in the evening he approached her, she affected great surprise and pleasure, and pretended not to have seen him until that moment. Mattie's triumph had been so complete that she was quite a centre after she descended from the platform, scroll in hand, led off by Mr. Martingale, the teacher of elocution, with her eyes cast down, her cheeks suffused with—blushes(?) She was dressed in India muslin, trimmed with Valenciennes lace over white silk. The dress had been sent from New York for the occasion, by order of Mrs. Howard, and was exquisitely fine and very stylish, though simply made.

Her soft black hair was arranged in a gypsyish fancy, peculiar to herself and very artistic, partly pushed back from the face by coral combs, and partly dropping in a few careless tendril ringlets behind her ears and from the invisible comb behind. She wore a gardenia in her back hair as all ornament. Her dress was clasped with coral cameos at waist and wrist and throat. Her fan and handkerchief were tiny—the first scarlet, the last a film of lace. Having very small feet, she had ventured on scarlet slippers and checked silk stockings, the only daring feature in her costume. She had composed by skilful mixtures a creamy powder, which, applied to her skin, gave its olive tint the hue of a magnolia leaf. Her hands alone remained impracticably brown, and these tiny claws she had encased in exquisite French gloves of

snowy kid, fitting to a fault, if such a thing may be. Two small hectic spots appeared on her delicate cheeks, and gave additional lustre to her large, well-opened black eyes, but whether natural or artificial it was absolutely impossible to determine, so daring was the fraud.

When she read, her parting lips disclosed small, pearly, glittering teeth, pointed and characteristic, and almost "varmint-like," as one of her rustic admirers had once vengefully told her, after she had mercilessly jilted him at dancing-school.

But from between those straight, thin lips and fang-like teeth issued a wonderful voice, clear, sweet, and flexible, if somewhat high-pitched, and capable of the nicest discriminations, the most passionate intonations imaginable.

She had told Doctor Trevor the truth, when she said her composition was "a nice mosaic, made from many books."

Not a quaint allusion, not a pathetic touch, not an eloquent description or appeal was there, that had not been carved out whole from some other book, and inserted in this literary patchwork; nor was this a case of consarcination. All was joined neatly and artistically together, and made to harmonize; and to do Mattie justice, there really were some original ideas scattered here and there, partaking of her own peculiar moods and humors, and clothed in very good native language.

The production was received with unanimous applause, and the fair reader greatly approved and admired, much to her own and Mr. Martingale's satisfaction, though, truth to tell, the success of Parthenia Forbes lay much nearer his heart of hearts.

In this, however, he was signally disappointed, as

Mattie had predicted to herself he would be, when he gave, and she acknowledged with what justice and good taste, his meed of preference to the essay of his younger pupil.

Parthenia was to succeed Mattie in the reading chair, her composition being considered the climax of the occasion, at least as far as this part of the exhibition was concerned; and in truth, for purity and consistency of thought and expression, and poetic power, it surpassed very far anything of which Mattie Lynne was capable, and was the result of a higher organization.

"Who is that young lady? She looks very much agitated, and very pale," asked Mr. Sinclair of his friend, Miss Jarvis, against the back of whose chair he was attitudinizing as Parthenia took her seat.

"I really can't inform you, Mr. Sinclair; I don't keep the run of Madame de Winter's school-girls at all. That was a brilliant creature, though, who was just led off. What pathos, what wit, what originality!"

"Yes, but superficial, I thought; *this* young lady has really a very interesting face. What a fine pose of the head, and what a correct profile! I like to look at her."

"So it seems; but why doesn't she begin, I wonder, and what makes her twitch so at the corner of her pocket-handkerchief? I can't conceive!"

"It is embarrassment," said the poor poet, who recognized at a glance the workings of the evil genius of his life. "She will be better directly, at least I hope so. I pity her sincerely."

"She is clearing her throat," said Miss Jarvis; "I suppose we shall have it now, whatever it is, good, bad, or indifferent; the last, I wager."

Mr. Sinclair made no reply, but for a moment forgot to attitudinize, and bent his ear to listen to the muffled voice that came reluctantly forth from that young, fair, swelling throat of moulded beauty.

Putting her hair resolutely back with one trembling hand, the same which contained the banner-like pocket-handkerchief, and choking back her tears, Parthenia Forbes began.

"She is a dowd," interpolated Miss Jarvis. "Whoever dressed her in that blue gown is her secret enemy, if not open foe. It fits wretchedly, and is a real dingy imitation of a washerwoman's blue bag (she had been reading an old copy of Fanny Kemble's journal a day or two before, and had been struck by this comparison), both as to shape and color."

"You will confuse her," said the compassionate Mr. Sinclair, bending low and speaking in the ear of Miss Jarvis; "she hears your voice and is looking this way. See how unhappy she seems!"

"For heaven's sake don't let that idiot make love to you, Caroline Jarvis!" whispered her mother on the other side, observing the confidential attitude of the handsome, penniless young poet. "I can tell you what, Colonel Carageen is observing you closely, and everything hangs on a hair now between you two. He will never stand another attack of jealousy like the last, and remember, twenty thousand a year is not to be sneezed at nor picked up every day."

"Be good enough to be silent," said Mr. Martingale, coming forward; "my pupil has not her usual voice to-night," then waving his hand majestically, he added, "Proceed now, if you please, Miss Parthenia."

A few muffled sentences, a few imperfect pauses, a few more gasping hesitations, and Parthenia Forbes was launched upon the waters of her subject, and was just beginning to lose sight of self in her occupation, and sail comfortably along, when an unforeseen contretemps occurred, in the shape of a most dismal shrieking, yelping, and otherwise discordant barking, that could not be, by any means, arrested or prevented, set up all at once by the little dog of Madame Baretti. There was a general laugh.

Parthenia Forbes burst into tears, rose, handed her composition to Mr. Martingale, and rushing down off the platform with both hands over her eyes, speedily disappeared.

"Poor thing, poor thing!" said Miss McClane, "I'm so sorry for her. She worked so hard and dreaded this ordeal so much. What a trial she has experienced!"

"Pity, pity," said Doctor Trevor to himself. "Yet what a lovely nature! it seems much more like *hers* than the other, brilliant little humming-bird as she is!"

Mr. Sinclair bit his lip and said nothing; he was intensely sympathetic, partly from fellow-feeling, which we were told of old, "makes us wondrous kind," partly, perhaps—but why anticipate?

Miss Jarvis laughed maliciously. "I knew it would be a failure," she said, "when I saw how dowdy she was; now, Miss Lynne's costume was perfect."

At this crisis Mr. Martingale stepped forth, with the composition Miss Forbes had handed him ostentatiously displayed, and proffered to read it himself, since he could not bear to see so much merit extinguished.

He did so, in a cut-and-dried, correct, and matter-of-

fact way, doing justice to all the stops, rolling all the r's, and hissing fiercely at every final s. Still it was a very wooden performance compared to Mattie Lynne's; though some there were who saw, through all these disadvantages, the beauty of the style and subject, and evidences of unmistakable genius.

Nothing could, however, entirely do away with the prestige of that absurd interruption; and suppressed laughter, at the memory of that scene and Madame Baretti's good-natured despair on the occasion, would burst out every now and then from the younger members of the audience like a half-smothered fire to interrupt Mr. Martingale, who, feigning not to perceive it, though deeply annoyed, read on steadily to the end.

As soon as he had finished, Miss McClane stole out in quest of Parthenia. She found her seated at her desk in the great, dim school-room, as if it had been some friendly refuge for despair in default of her mother's bosom, to pour out her grief and disappointment upon, sobbing bitterly in the first excess of her distress and mortification.

"Parthenia, this is unworthy of you," said Miss McClane, affecting sternness to conceal her own soft-hearted sympathy, which, she felt, would only unnerve the poor young creature the more if too clearly manifested. "You shouldn't have minded that interruption, or should have laughed it off like others; but the evil is all over now. Mr. Martingale read your composition himself, and it was very well received by all, and highly eulogized by many persons of taste. Come, dry your tears"—kissing her—"and let us go back together."

"Oh, no, no! I cannot go back, indeed, after dis-

gracing myself so foolishly. I was frightened in the beginning—all those eyes you know—and just as I was beginning to forget them that odious little dog began,” and she sobbed afresh. “Such a failure! What will mother think?”

“She will be proud of her child, when she receives the reports of her teachers; and this scene will only amuse her, probably, as you recount it. You will laugh about it yourself in a few days—nay, perhaps, to-morrow.”

“But I have made myself so very ridiculous. What did Mattie Lynne say?”

“I have not seen her since the occurrence.”

“Just to think! She will get the medal now, and I *was* to have had it, I know; Mr. Martingale told me he thought so. But it is only mother’s disappointment I care for.”

The mother in question was a refined and delicate woman, a widow with two children—a son and daughter—whose study it was to please her.

“Reflect on this, Parthenia,” said Miss McClane, laying her hand on the plump, white shoulders of the girl. “Your mother is well off, rich for aught I know, and *your* lines of life will be cast in pleasant places; but Mattie Lynne is fitting herself for a teacher as her means of livelihood, and this gold medal, which she will of course retain, may be the means of proving her capacity and obtaining for her a lucrative situation. You are generous enough, I know, to take this into consideration. As elocution and composition were to be combined, in order to gain this prize, you will, of course, be obliged to yield it to your only competitor. But even

had you read aloud your own composition, your delivery never could have vied with hers. You have not her confidence."

"No—no, indeed! I wish—oh, how I wish I had! I shall never attempt anything of the kind again, never. It is too dreadful." And here the child wept afresh.

"It was all I could do," said Miss McClane, "to prevent Madame Barette from following you with her little dog in her arms to crave your pardon. You must get Mattie, to-morrow, to imitate her despair, and her absurd reproaches to the poor, unconscious little offender. You know how well Mattie can do these things. As to the poor little poodle, I do not wonder he yelped. Some one had run a needle in the fleshy part of his long, bushy tail, as it hung over madame's lap. The little deaf and dumb boy is suspected who came with his mother (Mrs. Keene brought him merely because she thought it unsafe to leave him at home), and Madame de Winter will not hurt her feelings by making an investigation to-night; but the dog has been sent home in disgrace, and Madame Barette is inconsolable."

"Do tell Madame Barette, from me, never to think of it again. I am so sorry she is troubled on my account, and certainly the poor little dog was not the least to blame, nor the deaf and dumb boy either, who has not been taught better, nor any one, except—except—" she hesitated. "You are right, Miss McClane, I behaved very foolishly. I will make what reparation I can, and try and go back again before Madame Barette leaves. Do you think it would please her?"

"Very much, Parthenia."

"Miss McClane, I have a question to ask you before

you go; be good enough to tell me who *saw* poor little Freddy Keene run the needle in the dog's tail?"

"There is no absolute certainty about it; but Mattie Lynne told Madame de Winter that she thinks he did it. She was standing near when the dog commenced his agonizing shrieks. You are as solemn about the matter as a county court judge, Parthenia."

"It is a very solemn thing to have one's confidence in a *friend* suddenly shaken, Miss McClane, however trifling the cause. It comes to me like a flash that this was a piece of Mattie Lynne's dishonorable mischief. Don't look at me so reproachfully; the pain of this thought is the hardest of all to bear."

"But you have no right to entertain such a suspicion, Parthenia Forbes," said Miss McClane, indignantly. "It is absolutely wicked to malign a friend even in thought. I hope you will recant your impression before you sleep to-night, and above all, never breathe it to another."

"I will try and put it away from me, dear Miss McClane; but if I *cannot*, Mattie Lynne must know why I give her up."

"Give her up? What nonsense! This is sheer folly, presumption even. What foundation have you for such conduct, such belief?"

Parthenia Forbes solemnly tapped her breast with her left hand for all reply, and looked full in Miss McClane's face. There was something rather striking in the action, the expression of the young, true face, so sweet on inspection, so little captivating to the common beholder at first sight.

"Parthenia, your romantic notions will be the death of you," said Miss McClane, turning away impatiently,

and somewhat disgusted. "Do you mean to allege," she said, pausing before she went many steps from the desk, beneath a dingy lamp, and speaking in a sharp, sarcastic tone, "that Mattie Lynne plunged that needle in with her own hands? Is this what you think?"

"I consider her the instigator of a ready and defenceless tool," was the calm and firm reply of the young girl. "Make what you will of it, Miss McClane."

"Not mischief, certainly, then, my dear mistaken child," said Miss McClane, kindly. "I shall never be a fomenter of discord. You are excited now. Let me beg you to say nothing more on this subject to-night to any one. Bathe your face, brush your hair, change your dress, if you wish to escape identification. You are better in white muslin than this blue dress, which lights so ill; though pretty enough in the day time, and come in quietly again to the saloon. Treat Mattie Lynne as you always do, and smile at Madame Baretti. I think by this means all these pernicious vapors will be dissipated."

"I will follow your advice to the letter," said the young girl, rising from her desk, "and strive against conviction. For this much believe: I would go through that dreadful trial thrice over and lose a hundred medals, even to the disappointment of my precious mother, rather than keep these thoughts against Mattie Lynne, if I *can cast them out*."

"You are honest, at all events," thought Miss McClane, as she turned her face from the school-room again, "and your instincts are undefiled. My God! if this should be true! How dreadful! Levity is surely the devil's delight; the opening wedge to all abominations. There are highway robbers who would not do so mean a

thing. But I must not entertain for a moment so foul a suspicion; that is the worst of aspersion. It stains whether we will or not. Boys cast mud in the street on the passers by, and the whitest garments are soiled, be they ever so carefully protected. No! Mattie Lynne is incapable of such a petty malignity."

As she entered the saloon she saw Mattie Lynne in animated conversation with Doctor Trevor, and the expression of his face was one of delighted attention. She paused a moment and surveyed them attentively.

"Am I mistaken in my estimate of this man after all?" she murmured. "But I forget, circumstances are changed; he is at liberty now. Yet I should be sorry, sorry indeed, for his own sake, that he should wed at last so 'slight a thing' as this, after proving the love of the noblest, sweetest, most unselfish nature the sun ever shone upon, and putting it calmly by, even to its own despair."

About eleven o'clock Parthenia Forbes entered the saloon alone, very pale, but resolute. She made her way straight to Madame Baretti.

"I hope your little dog is not injured, madame," she said. "I was so sorry—"

Mr. Guiseppe rose, lame as he was, and interrupted her by the offer of his seat, which she gracefully declined.

"Oh, zu are very good, indeed," said the warm-hearted foreigner. "Nosing could have been more inopportune; but de poor little Zylphide was not entirely to blame. A very great indignity, indeed, vas offered to her tail—which she always resent, even ven de torture is not inflict—vich, in dis case, it very truly vas."

"And the poor little dumb boy did it? Of course he knew no better."

"I don't know," with a shrug of the shoulder; "he say 'yes,' he say 'no;,' his own moder could make ver little of vat he say; but my son and Miss Lynne, dey both are of de opinion he *did* insert de needle vich Doctor Bellair vas good enough to take out vonce more. Do you know de young Doctor Bellair, dear yong lady? Oh, he is von charming man, and dere he standa. Come here to me, Bellair," shrieking and beckoning at the same time, so as to silence all those immediately around. "I vish to introduce you to de heroine of de night, Miss Forbes, vat my poor Zylphide chased away by her cries."

Thus summoned, Doctor Bellair came promptly. He was a very ugly, jimber-jawed young man, with red, bushy hair and side whiskers; but gentlemanly, intelligent, and facetious; on the whole, quite agreeable.

He took Parthenia in to supper, introduced Mr. Sinclair to her at his own request, and astonished Miss Jarvis, whose power of observation or identification never went beyond costume, by pointing out "that pretty little thing in white, with the statuesque shoulders," as the identical reader who broke down at the barking of the dog, and fled from the platform like Banquo's ghost.

After supper Mattie Lynne came affectionately up to Parthenia, still clinging to the arm of Doctor Trevor.

"Dear child," she said, "I hardly knew you in your change of dress. I thought you were still in the blues; but I declare I think you *do* look better in white after all. My judgment was at fault, I confess. So you two poets have found each other out. Mr. Sinclair, have you read 'Counterparts?' It is just out. It is delightful;

just such a book as you would be apt to take up on a fashionable table in the next sphere; all film, dream, and syllabub. I am reminded of it by seeing you two together. Ralph and Cecilia, no doubt, to perfection! Doctor Trevor, you and I will have to play Rose and Saron, I fear."

"I have not read the book, Miss Lynne," said Mr. Sinclair, stiffly; she was his "pet aversion" (that phrase again), and trod on the corns of his amour propre all the time.

"At such recommendation we must all read it," said Doctor Trevor, blandly; "don't you think so, Miss Forbes? or do you eschew novels?"

"It has not been recommended to me by such references," was Parthenia's slow reply.

"Nor to me," said Mr. Sinclair, "by Miss Lynne's characterization of its contents—'foam' and 'syllabub.'"

"'Film!' I said. 'Film!' rejoined Mattie. "The words are several: 'syllabub' is 'foam,' and I hate tautology. But you shall read the book, and see the truth of my criticism for yourself; and so shall Parthenia, for I own it, sister sent it to me last week, and her own novel 'Falconbridge,' as well. The murder is out now and may as well be avowed."

"I have read that," said Mr. Sinclair; "it is splendid. Is it possible such blood of authorship runs in your veins?"

"And I must read it," whispered Doctor Trevor; "since *your sister* wrote it. Where can I get a copy?"

"I will send you mine," replied Mattie, bending upon him a pair of beaming eyes. "I had intended to lend it first to Miss McClane, but—" and she wheeled away

from the group so as to finish her sentence, unheard by all save one—"but you are beyond and above all."

"I do believe this girl knows," mused the doctor, "of that old acquaintanceship, if such it might be called. This promised story of the vision may all be a trap to draw me out on the subject. I am determined not to speak *first*, however. I do not care to be identified, nor to see Mrs. Howard again, as the wife of that man. Or perhaps the poor child is throwing herself at my head, like the wretched moth that flings its life away in the blaze that attracts it. God forbid! God forbid! I have seen enough of that sort of thing. Ida McClane, *you* made me an anchorite, and yet how was I any more to blame then than now?"

He was roused from reverie by the vibrant tones of her fresh young voice.

"You are absent, Doctor Trevor," said Mattie. "I have made three several and sapient remarks to you, unanswered so far, within the last two minutes. These precious books of the sibyl are now lost to you forever, you foolish modern Pompilions; and you will have to pay very dear for the rest, I can promise you."

"What price shall I offer you, fair sibyl?" he said, with enforced gayety.

"Your implicit attention whenever I speak to you again," she answered.

"Command my ear always, Miss Lynne."

"Ah, doctor, that appendage alone would ill satisfy my requisitions; I go deeper in my demands." She laughed merrily; the whole scene to him was painful and discordant. He said gravely, too gravely for the occasion, perhaps:

"Dear young lady, my age and calling both befit me to be a most discreet father confessor. If you have any love secrets or hidden maladies, you may confide them, with equal safety, to my keeping. But my habits of solitude render me often absent-minded and unfit for the society of the young and joyous. One of these moods is stealing over me to-night, irresistibly, and I must depart. Besides I have business at home to attend to before I sleep that concerns others, and it is after midnight now, so let me tell you good-night and steal quietly away. Let me add: Miss McClane has promised me to come with you and your friend to breakfast, on Thursday; we shall all be rested by that time, and you will then recount to me your vision, in which I take a true professional interest, if, indeed, a quack like me may be said to have any profession at all."

He dropped her hand and was gone in another moment, and before she could well reply.

"A very summary proceeding," thought Mattie. "Can he suspect? Well, what if he does? He is queer and peculiar, that is all. Old bachelors are always so, and old maids, too; bear witness, Miss McClane, and here she comes on the strength of the old adage."

"Mattie, Madame de Winter is looking for you."

"What does she want, Miss McClane?"

"Doctor Spartacus and Mrs. Jarvis both ask to be presented to the Corinne of the evening."

"Let them come to me then, Miss McClane. I will not seek them."

"Shall I tell Madame de Winter that?" asked her friend, anxiously.

"No, no. Just say that you could not find me."

"But I cannot say that with any truth, Mattie."

"Good-night, then. I am sick, weary. I am going to bed. Going, going, *gone!* as the auctioneers say," and she disappeared.

"The truth is," she murmured, as she sprang up-stairs to her bedroom, "all things 'are stale, flat, and unprofitable' after his departure. Old Spartacus would leave me as flaccid as a dead holly-hock leaf. He is as bad as Crawford in the suction line, and as to Mrs. Jarvis! Well, the only thing is this: I prefer dying a natural death, when I do die, to a violent one, and putting it off as long as possible. Mrs. Jarvis is a born assassin.

"Ah! Mattie Lynne," a little later, addressing her own reflection in the glass. "You are not very beautiful, nor accomplished, nor prepossessing; but you have this advantage over most people—you know your points. I am very much pleased with your success, my dear, this evening, and with your conduct in all regards save one. That foolish escapade of the dog's tail was unworthy of a girl of your dignity and genius. Puck must have been perched on my shoulder, at that moment. But I never should have carried out my idea if that child had not been so preternaturally quick. When I dropped the needle which the mantua-maker had left sticking in the bosom of my dress, he picked it up and held it between his fingers; I pointed to the dog's tail; this was all absolutely, and laughed at him out of the corner of my eye. He took like wildfire (there *is* freemasonry between us, I am convinced), and I regretted the whole thing the next moment. But before I could arrest his hand, lo! the most terrific shrieks from the aggrieved animal,

which the child, not hearing, did not regard at all, but remained by Madame Baretti's side with the most stolid countenance, while I, convulsed with many conflicting emotions, was obliged to accuse him to save myself. It was a clear case of self-defence as ever was made out by a lawyer.

"I believe, verily, that Parthenia Forbes suspects my complicity, from the expression of her eye and her general manner. If I find this to be true, I shall make a clear breast of it, and throw myself on her clemency, which is marvellous, like that of most romantic people.

"She will love me better than ever for my candor, after she recovers from the shock, and I will make her swear never to tell Miss McClane, for it would ruin me with her forever. As to *lying* out of the matter, that is what I would not stoop to do were the stake a scaffold! I am above that, I hope. I am too proud, too courageous, too indifferent to consequences, to tell deliberate falsehoods.

"I believe there is but one thing on earth would compel me to such a course, and that would be the fear of losing sister Hester's affections, and not gaining those of Trevor.

"Oh, man, man; you must love me, or I will eat my own heart!" She said this in the most tragical manner, setting her small, glittering teeth together at the termination of her threat (one she had met with recently in the pages of a French novel, and which greatly struck her fancy), and clasping her hands tightly over her heart, then watching the effect of the whole pose in the glass, and finally bursting into a hearty laugh at her own absurdity and expense.

"Her evil conscience troubled her" somewhat, however, in her dreams.

She saw Parthenia Forbes, with her pale, locked face, significant of displeasure. She met the angry glance of Miss McClane. Through a dim vista she beheld the clearly-defined forms of her sister Hester and Doctor Trevor gliding off hand and hand into the distance, and sending back sorrowful and reproachful glances upon her. Their pace was unearthly, like that of spirits, as we imagine it, and their faces pale, and touched with more than mortal beauty, as it seemed to her. Then a great bird of paradise feather took possession of the whole scene, and the voice of Madame de Winter aroused her from her slumber, speaking loud and clear in the corridor to the housemaids.

She sprang from her bed of feverish slumber unrefreshed. This was on Wednesday, and the next morning was that fixed upon for the breakfast of Doctor Trevor.

That was a very miserable day to Mattie Lynne, on which she had to manoeuvre from morning till night; first, to disarm Parthenia's indignation, and next, to save her character in the estimation of Miss McClane.

"It was a little matter, it is true; but women like her think so much of little things, and stumble over straws continually," urged Mattie to Parthenia, as they sat once more hand in hand, after forgiveness had been asked and granted, and dust completely thrown in the eyes of the offended party by the partial candor of the offender.

"But, Mattie, I have already mentioned my suspicions. Now can I falsify my words?"

"Say that you have thought better of them, Parthenia."

"But, Mattie," hesitatingly, "I have *not* done this.

My thoughts are the same as before, only your frank confession and true regret have smoothed everything away. I hope Miss McClane may not mention the subject."

"And if she does?"

"Then, Mattie, I must speak the truth."

"Of course you must; but not the *whole* truth; don't you see the distinction? I am as much above a falsehood as yourself, yet I discriminate. I only tell what I choose to tell. That is true independence, believe me."

"I will do what I can with *honor*," said Parthenia, "to screen you, Mattie. I do not wonder you are ashamed of the transaction. I should have been in your place."

This was said with perfect simplicity.

"Thank you," said Mattie, bitterly, setting her small white teeth as if to bite off the end of the unwilling word; "you are truly magnanimous, Parthenia," sarcastically.

"I am sure I wish to be; but there are some small scruples I never can get over. I could always sympathize with Jeannie Deans, when called upon for her testimony. It is so hard to tell a story when one is used to truth speaking, and mother has always laid such stress on perfect veracity. And oh, dear Mattie, I am so glad you told me the truth, for it was a bitter trial to you, I know, to do so under the circumstances, and if you had not, we should have been separated forever, for I never could have believed otherwise than I did about that matter."

"A very important matter after all to lay such stress upon!" sneered Mattie. "Child, you make mountains of mole-hills; winking at a deaf and dumb imp of evil,

and looking at a dog's tail, and dropping a rusty needle on the floor by sheer accident, are all heinous offences to be sure. What a hair-splitter you are becoming! I will pass over the gold medal to your keeping, if you say much more, and lay bare the whole transaction. I hope *that* will satisfy you of my sincerity."

"No, Mattie, I would not receive your medal; it is yours by right of superior elocution, if not composition; so Miss McClane says, your friend and mine; but let us drop this subject forever, dear, dear friend—mischievous and impulsive, I know, sometimes, but truthful and penitent ever, when reparation is to be made."

"You are a born detective, Parthenia," said Mattie, smiling, "and I thought all this time you were a brilliant specimen of the class, *Dupe*. What put it into your head that I had any complicity in that absurd affair? Answer me, child! I ask metaphysically."

Again Parthenia tapped her breast mysteriously, and looked with stern, grave eyes right into Mattie's face. This was too much for human gravity, in Mattie's opinion, and she rang a peal of her clear, silvery laughter, in which Parthenia did not join.

"Mattie, Mattie!" she said, "I am sorry you are so light-minded. I would not have pained you for the world as you have done me; and now you are adding mockery to injury. Don't laugh in that sudden, wild way. It jars upon me as I cannot describe. Don't, Mattie, if you love me!" and she waved her gentle hand, and turned away mournfully.

In another moment Mattie's arms were round her neck, and the two girls were weeping together, or, perhaps on one part, making believe to weep; and after the

rain came the sunshine, and in moral as in physical nature, all was peace thereafter.

Miss McClane was discreet enough to ask no questions, though it is to be feared her estimate of Mattie Lynne underwent some change from the moment when Parthenia Forbes so solemnly tapped her breast, as an indication of her instinctive conviction.

Miss McClane was not one, however, to foment discord, or to inquire deeply into the affairs of others, being a woman deficient in some of the superior elements demanded by society. So she contented herself with the reconciliation of the friends, and tried to make the best of the matter.

Thursday morning found the three ladies, congenial yet so different—the favored three who alone, from the establishment of Madame de Winter, were invited to the *déjeuner à la fourchette* at the hall of Somnus—setting forth, daintily attired, on their way to the mansion of Doctor Trevor.

What transpired on this occasion we reserve for a separate chapter.

CHAPTER IV.

THE AUTOCRAT OF THE BREAKFAST-TABLE.

AT twelve o'clock exactly, Doctor Trevor entered his drawing-room, where his guests already awaited him, for his engagements had been imperative up to that moment, on the morning set for the breakfast.

He had committed the preparation of his banquet to

competent and even artistic hands, and Mademoiselle Therese Cocquelicot, his ancient housekeeper, superintended the spreading of the board with the superb damask linen, thick as brocaded satin, the handsome silver service and the rich purple and gold china, which Doctor Trevor had in reserve, and probably held as heirlooms.

So thought Mattie, at least, as she noted the cipher and crest on every massive fork and spoon, or dish, or pitcher, and the exquisite devices on the plates and bowls, adorned with those flowers alone which are, by nature, born in the purple.

Hyacinths, harebells, violets, passion flowers, and china asters, with here and there a bunch of grapes, natural enough to tempt a bird to peck thereat, were exquisitely painted on the white ground of the fine Dresden china with which the board was spread. The table was octagon, centrally adorned with an epergne sustaining a superb basket of flowers surrounded with fruits of all descriptions, and arrayed with a service of graven Bohemian glass.

Wines of many descriptions sparkled on the sideboard, for which glasses were in preparation of every size and shape, and the collation was to be served in the Russian style, not then so customary at entertainments as it has since become.

The host had imported his cooks for the occasion from a neighboring city, as well as many of the delicacies in store for his guests; who, eight in number, occupied the whole octagon, each having a department of the wide and massive table, separately.

These "convives" consisted of four ladies and as many

gentlemen. To the three friends from Madame de Winter's was added one guest of the doctor's own establishment, in the shape of an elderly lady afflicted with palsy, who trembled all the time, and to whom Mattie mischievously applied some lines from Tennyson's "Marianna in the Moated Grange":

"Hard by a poplar shook alway
All silvery gray—with gnarled bark."

The party was Mattie's, and she should, she thought, have been consulted in the choosing, or fitness, of the guests, according to etiquette, and certainly in this case there would have been a very different collection.

Mr. Sinclair's name would most assuredly have been struck off the list, because he both penetrated and hated her. Doctor Bellair's, because he absorbed too much of the conversation (Mattie liked foils), and Professor Jan Jeune (the most inoffensive of men, and sometimes rather agreeable), because the association of ideas was not pleasant with him as to bugs and worms. Mattie had her fastidious vein as well as others. As to the old lady smitten with palsy, she should never have sat quivering like an aspen tree opposite Mattie Lynne, if wish of hers could have vacated her chair and annihilated its occupant, even if a Banquo's ghost had risen to supply the place of that blanc mange image.

In place of these incumbrances, Mr. Martingale should have been invited to keep Miss McClane engaged (there was a tacit liking between these two which Mattie had observed, and which would have been useful on this occasion), and two dancing-school beaux for Parthenia Forbes should have been summoned to form a guard on either side, and then one vacant chair between the host and

all other guests, except herself, seated beside him, and the matter would have been to her mind complete.

As it was, things went wrong at the beginning. Contrary to all precedent of ceremony, the doctor handed in his old paralytic patient, Mrs. Murray, and seated her at his right hand, in the place of honor. To Mattie, who came in with Doctor Bellair, he accorded the seat at his left, Professor Jau Jeune and Miss McClane coming next. Mr. Sinclair and Parthenia Forbes, who fell together very naturally, defiled to the right, and conversed chiefly in an undertone during the repast, their handsome faces being the principal ornaments of the otherwise not very goodly company.

Doctor Trevor was an easy host, and consequently his guests were expected to be at ease. He left the chief offices of his table to his man Caspar and his page little John; the first a burly German, thoughtful and efficient, however; the last an English boy he had picked up on a late voyage across the Atlantic, and trained to usefulness—a perfect Ariel of celerity.

"I see but two dishes wanting on this sumptuous table," said Mattie, musingly, when the last course of meats had been placed upon the board, "but two," and she shook her head.

The attention of the guests was at once riveted on the whimsical girl, who dared to find fault with such a *recherché* repast, and to cavil at the feast of her Lucullus.

"Lambs stuffed with pistachio nuts, and fish baked between hot stones, with bread fruits! I have been longing to taste those dishes ever since I was six years old, and read Captain Cook's voyages and the 'Arabian Nights,' believing, and I certainly expected to find them here to-day; but I am doomed to disappointment."

Doctor Trevor affected to make a note of the omission for future reference, smiling at the adroitness of the girl's flattery as he did so, through the means of these far-fetched objections.

The old paralytic lady, who was a literal person, amused every one by saying, "My dear, one should not be so exacting at your age. I am very sure the doctor has done his best to entertain you. Now, if you had said fresh mackerel and Sally Lunn bread, it would have appeared more reasonable like to me; but where was Doctor Trevor to procure these articles you mentioned?"

"Where, indeed?" echoed Mattie, tragically, laughing merrily in the next moment.

The ball Mattie had thrown out carelessly rebounded briskly from hand to hand, and did much to break up restraint so far somewhat visible, despite the ease of the host among the guests.

"You have omitted snail soup, doctor, and barbecued frogs, two of my essentials, usually," said Professor Jau Jeune, seriously; "but I think I can manage to make out with these ortolans served with rice croquets in true Carolina style. Reed-birds ignoble people call these little delectable fowls that they are, which burst open, when they fall shot on the ground, with their own fatness. Stay, Caspar, be not in a hurry; give me four; each one is but a mouthful."

"A mouthful!" said Mattie, slyly glancing at the huge receptacle which divided the professor's face so completely, that it was mysterious how the chin managed to hang on to the rest of the countenance.

"*Cela dépend!* a mouthful is an equivocal expression. You are thinking of quails, perhaps."

"Quails without manna," growled Doctor Bellair; "this is incomprehensible. What *have* you been thinking about, my dear medical Lucullus? Since the time of the Jews, the two have been inseparable. I miss, too, my favorite locusts and wild honey, without which no meal can be said to be complete to one who has ever been regaled on the favorite food of John the Baptist."

"Good sakes!" said Mrs. Murray, throwing up her trembling hands. "I thought he lived on them for want of something better to eat away out in the desert. Just to think of Christian people eating such as that! in these enlightened times, too!"

"Why, madam, what would you think of a Chinese entertainment I once attended," said Professor Jau Jeune, "during which, birds' nests were served to the guests in the following refined manner:

"A great basin of soup was set in the midst of the table, on the surface of which birds' nests were floating—cold soup, madam—a sort of gelatinous mixture, not unlike liquid calf's-foot jelly, but served without a ladle or any evident means of helping it, so that the guests were in a state of abeyance for some time.

"This is esteemed a great luxury, madam, in that land of singular processes, and we were, of course, in a condition of fond expectation, when, at a signal from the host, a butler, with a pigtail at his back, and wearing a long gown, turned-up slippers, and voluminous pantaloons, like Mr. Mantalini's, appeared, bearing a silver salver in his hand, on which was seated the most exquisite little creature I have ever seen of its kind. You have read the fairy story of the white cat, madam, probably, in the period of your imaginative childhood?"

"I can't say I ever did," interrupted Mrs. Murray, impatiently. "I was trained to pious reading."

"Well, madam, there is nothing impious in this tale, I can assure you, and in this statement I am sure the younger ladies present will fully bear me out. A little dog is introduced in the course of this fairy tale, small enough to lie hidden in a walnut, the price of an Eastern throne. Such, almost literally, was the diminutive size of the snow-white creature who sat complacently on the silver salver, gazing about with intelligent, bright eyes, on the assembled company—"

"Dear—dear! How pretty it must have been!" said Mrs. Murray.

"I hope they did not want to eat it?" said Parthenia Forbes, indignantly, who had read of puppies being sacrificed in China to human gourmands, and who was naturally a friend of the canine race; nay, a champion thereof.

"No, not at all. There were several dishes of fricasseed poodle on table," said Professor Jau Jeune, with provoking coolness, "differently seasoned, and very much relished indeed by most of the company. But this one was our ladle, without which, our soup would have been as inaccessible as a feast of Tantalus.

"I found that one of the great ceremonials of the feast was about to be enacted now. Rising with great dignity and ostentation, the master of the ceremonies, a Mandarin of the first order—of sixteen tails, I believe—took from the salver the little snow-white dog, and flung him into the soup. I forgot to say he was of a spaniel breed, and swam like a Newfoundland. The end of it was, the intelligent little creature seized a bird's nest in its

mouth, and dipping it in the soup, swam towards each guest in succession with one of these filled with the delicious liquid, which was received with chopsticks, and carefully conveyed by the individual so favored to the bowl before him, and then, I need not say, eagerly partaken of, enjoyed, and eulogized."

"The nasty creatures!" exclaimed Mrs. Murray, sinking back with disgust.

"I don't believe a word of it," murmured Parthenia Forbes to Mr. Sinclair, with a flushed cheek. She was one of those persons who could not discriminate between quizzing and lying. Sophistry had no hold on her simple belief in the justice of veracity, and she felt herself aggrieved personally, whenever defrauded of the truth, for any purpose, or with any intent, however harmless.

"It is not intended you should believe it," said Mr. Sinclair, smiling. "When you have lived a little longer in the world, you will learn to make allowances for Munchausenism. It is one of the elements of society."

"Never," said Parthenia, almost passionately. "I shall never learn that lesson. I hate lies and the father of lies."

Mr. Sinclair was much amused, but liked his young companion none the less for this frank avowal, which tallied well with his own native inclinations. Poetic minds are essentially truthful in most instances. Instinct is truth; and genius is only a higher sort of instinct. Talent and duplicity very often, on the contrary, go together; for talent is the parent of art; whereas genius is the child of nature.

But this is no time for dissertation. Mattie is laughing with Doctor Trevor at the professor's ridiculous

story, when she hears Mr. Sinclair complain, in pursuance of her own suggestion, that nightingales' brains had been omitted as his part of the entertainment, and "Riz de veau sante aux champignons" substituted therefor.

"You surely will not venture on mushrooms," said Mattie, significantly, and with her eyes brimming with malice, as Mr. Sinclair helped himself from a dish, now in circulation.

"I am not at all afraid of their effects," he said, bowing coldly. "I have every confidence in the sanitary condition of all who partake of mushrooms at this table, Miss Lynne."

"Nay, but the cannibalism of the thing in some instances," said Mattie, coolly.

Sinclair choked, dropped the spoon he held; his family was obscure and he himself among the upstarts, in her opinion; and Mattie Lynne had this poor infidel on the hip for the time being, completely.

It was an unprovoked insult, surely; yet one that had to be endured, and which Charlie Sinclair was too forgiving to avenge later. But he found his Nemesis in Doctor Trevor's cold and averted face; and the impression this gentleman received of Mattie's wanton levity and inhumanity, never to be effaced.

As to Parthenia, she did not catch the idea at all, or even overhear what was so carelessly said, perhaps, being pretty much occupied at the time with interchanging glances with Miss McClane—deprecating on the part of this lady, but significant on hers—of her intense disgust at Professor Jan Jeune's unblushing tergiversation.

After this there was, for a time, a pretty general flow of conversation, in which Doctor Trevor led the way

with spirit, and Miss McClane followed with good effect. Then another set-to between Mattie and Doctor Bellair, in which the battledore and shuttlecock game of badinage was played to perfection, each understanding and respecting the other as an equal adversary, and careful not to strike too hard in the mock tournament, into the lists of which they entered for the exhibition of their powers and prowess, and the amusement of the company.

Later, when a lull crept over the conversation again, Professor Jau Jeune proposed to relate another of his surprising adventures, twinkling his small green eyes and grinning horribly as he did so, after his peculiar fashion. A turned-up nose and broad, sallow cheeks completed this truly original physiognomy, Calmuc in character, in which mockery, malice, and good-humor seemed constantly contending, and which his friends learned to forget to call hideous, when they knew the worth of the man to whom it belonged.

"Let us have it, professor, by all means," responded the doctor, heartily. "Have you found a new butterfly, or discovered that mysterious link between birds and insects for which you have been seeking so long?"

"Nothing of the kind! I have simply seen pigmies, so long a matter of dispute, even though vouched for by so great a master as Homer. You have read his battles of the pigmies and the frogs and cranes, I suppose, my good friends?"—diffusively.

"Yes, or what passes for his," said Doctor Trevor; "but the adventure, Jau Jeune! The dessert is on the table, the appetite needs respite, this is the chosen time."

"It was simply this," said the professor, wiping his moustache thoroughly with his napkin, and composing

himself in his chair thereafter, while he made bread balls with the fingers of his right hand.

"But you must all promise to believe me before I begin, for I declare to you, on the veracity of a gentleman, every word I am about to tell you is solemnly, if funnily true, which is not always the case, you know."

"Oh, of course," said Miss McClane. "It is very ill-bred *not* to believe veracious persons, even if what they state be unusual or inconceivable to us."

"We will believe you if we can," said Parthenia, shortly, with severe simplicity that amused her host; beguiled out of her reserve, however, by the strength of her curiosity.

"We will believe you whether we can or not," said Mattie, archly. "Professor, will that answer?"

"Yes; that is just what we will agree to do," said Doctor Bellair, evidently charmed with the sallies of his lively companion, and anxious to have the professor's recital over.

And so encouraged in his Munchausen proclivities, Professor Jau Jeune cleared his throat to begin, first extending his goblet to Caspar for a glass of champagne, which he swallowed at a draught.

"The bead on that wine would inspire the Venerable Bede himself," said Doctor Bellair, "so be brilliant, Jau Jeune."

"As little preamble as possible," plead Doctor Trevor, knowing the propensity to moralize and detail that pervaded the narratives of Jau Jeune, often amusing otherwise, from their oddity.

"Let the preface be brief and pithy," echoed Miss McClane.

"Point your anecdotes or you blunt the appreciation of your audience," counselled Mr. Sinclair.

"Why you will never give the professor a chance to begin," said Mrs. Murray, who was quivering all over in the most surprising way. "Do commence, Professor Jau Jeune. I am curious to hear your second adventure; but pray what are pigmies—not Guinea pigs, I reckon? I never heard tell of such things."

"Pigmies are very small people, madam, a race of dwarfs. Let me thank you for your intervention, without which I should never have been able to show my skill as a truthful *râconteur*. Your health, madam," and mutely extending his glass, it was refilled by Caspar, and again he quaffed a modicum of pink champagne.

"And may your shadow never be less steady," whispered Mattie.

Mrs. Murray made a low obeisance to this friendly salutation, though she drank no wine; and now the doctor began in good earnest.

"I had been out all day, near the waters of Kikanik creek, not twenty miles from Ilium, hunting a specimen I needed of the 'phalanæ' family, and there is no larger, or more various, and let me add, more interesting or splendid one in the whole range of entomology; those especially 'ornatæ,' and 'dentatæ,' at the same time are singularly attractive, and when to this is added the 'deflexæ' form, nothing could appear more desirable to a natural—"

Here a low groan from Doctor Bellair interrupted and warned the professor that the audience was impatient, and at the very moment when he dubbed himself an idiot, cut off what might have proved quite an instructive lecture

on entymology had it been carried out, if somewhat prolix.

"Well, well, I cannot expect you to be interested in all that; but it was exactly such a specimen as this a boy had brought me once from the fields that lie around the waters of the Kikanik, and precisely such a one I was after now, and I had the great good fortune after eight hours of incessant pursuit and watchfulness, to see the very butterfly I wanted settle down on a hibiscus flower in the exact position most favorable for netting, with wings flattened out, the most splendid creature, bright-eyed, fully six inches from tip to tip, and spotted like a leopard, with the tiger stripes between. '*Pictæ*,' we naturalists call that style of ornamentation, most elaborate and exquisite as it is. I can see it yet 'in my mind's eye, Horatio.' More wine, Caspar. I have rarely been more gratified or excited in the whole course of my life than on this occasion. Fancy portrayed already the huge specimen of the very finest type of the phalanæ family pinned, fluttering to the wall at my bed-head. I could scarcely contain my rapture, but felt like shouting like a boy, which would have startled the butterfly; they are very sensitive to sounds and vibrations, contrary to the received opinion which presupposes prominent eyes, made to see all around, on the principle of compensation, to be coincident with oral dulness. But this is a great mistake, as I might prove very satisfactorily, were time and opportunity allowed me." Here another groan from Doctor Bellair gave warning. "However I will not weary you now with scientific details. Where was I? Oh, poised above the butterfly, net in hand, one foot slightly elevated behind like a flying cupid, my whole weight

thrown on the other (imagine the attitude, if you please, and me in it; it is a graceful, if an inconvenient one), when suddenly a low shriek, like a peal of elfish laughter, arrested my attention and caused me to look back involuntarily, and I beheld the strangest sight! Ladies and gentlemen, 'figurez vous,' as the French say, a female figure, a foot and a half high, dressed like a Swiss peasant, with a broom in its hand, a tiny, perfectly-made besom as ever delighted a housewife's eyes, sweeping clean a little rocky platform, above which on an overhanging pinnacle sat another figure dressed in ragged regimentals of some sort, and wearing a cocked hat and plume, with an amusing air of command, to which her elfish laughter was addressed."

"How strange!" said Parthenia Forbes, solemnly. "How awful!" Doctor Trevor smiled.

"An optical delusion, of course," whispered Mr. Sinclair, in an explanatory way.

"You was a dreaming, probably," said old Mrs. Murray, "and saw those things in your vision. I mind a dream I had once on a time—"

"No, madam, as wide awake as—as Miss Mattie Lynne, or, to use a vulgar comparison, a catfish, never presumed to sleep at all," interrupted the professor, earnestly. "With my own clear eyes—the eyes that God gave me, not my green goggles—I saw this astounding brace of figures. Moreover, I touched them, discoursed with them later. They were flesh and blood, and bone and skin, I assure you, singular as it may seem."

"Escaped Aztecs, I suppose," observed Doctor Bel-lair, superciliously.

"Monkeys!" said Mattie Lynne, shrieking with laughter. "Monkeys, nothing else!"

"I was too polite to spoil your story in my own house, or I should have made the same suggestion when the ragged regimentals were mentioned," said Doctor Trevor, laughing outright.

"And do you call *that* an adventure?" asked Mrs. Murray, contemptuously. "Why, I have seen these creatures myself, many times at circuses and shows when I was young, and before I joined the Methodists, and later with the hand-organ boys." She was grave with disappointment.

"Precisely, my dear madam: you anticipate me at every point. I was just going on to state that while I stood gazing in rapt attention, a little Italian boy strolled along, bearing a hurdy-gurdy on his arm, and asked me in a broken way, whether I had seen his estrays, 'Louis Napoleon,' and 'Lola Montez,' whereupon I pointed politely to the rocky platform, and he captured them forthwith."

"Oh, dear!" said Mrs. Murray, drawing a long breath. "How relieved you must have felt! They might have been fairies!"

"And the butterfly, Jau Jeune—the leopard-spotted tiger-striped miracle of insect beauty; what became of that? Did it escape you?"

"Oh! I lost it, of course. While I was watching those effigies it eluded me, and I went home disappointed, I may say heart-sick. The next day, however, I was fortunate enough to find a rare scarabæus."

Here a violent fit of coughing attacked Doctor Bel-lair—while Mattie mischievously queried, "on your own nose, perhaps?"—he could not check it either by remedy or persuasion, until Professor Jau Jeune came to terms,

which he did sullenly enough, and not without a struggle.

"I had rather a wonderful adventure of my own last year on a prairie in Illinois," said Doctor Trevor, after an interval of commentary. "We were crossing from one town to another outside of the railroad lines—a stage full of passengers—when a violent storm overtook us. The night had closed in some time before, and the horses taking fright at the glare of the lightning, ran for some distance on the level plain, and finally succeeded in breaking loose from the stage, upsetting it at the same moment, and plunging wildly away.

"We were all, more or less, bruised, not badly hurt, however, and being pretty closely packed, succeeded very slowly in extricating ourselves from the vehicle. I was among the last to creep out, as two portly dames had to be removed before I could move hand or foot, and as I emerged from the window of the stage, I saw what seemed at the moment the creation of a delirious fancy. Relieved against the low-lying electric clouds that skirted the horizon ablaze with vivid lightning nearly continuously, I saw a gigantic elephant standing immovable as a bronze statue, and apparently studying the scene with philosophic grandeur. I rose, planted myself against the stage securely to observe him, still fancying myself brain-sick from my blow and overturn, when throwing his trunk over his head, he trumpeted defiantly, as if in answer to the pealing thunder above him, and galloped madly across the prairie, plunging into the outer darkness.

"You understand how it was, of course. A menagerie was crossing the prairie, headed as usual by the elephant

(this was the vast brute Columbus, afterwards drowned in crossing a river; the largest creature of his species ever brought to this continent), when rendered unmanageable by the storm he broke away; but the effect was wonderful at such a time and place.

"I do not regret at all, I assure you, having seen the elephant, under such circumstances."

"A few giraffes scattered about, and an escaped tiger and python serpent would have transported you in imagination to the wilds of Africa!" said Doctor Bellair. "I am tempted on the strength of your narratives to give you a bit of my experience in the *superstitious* line. A glass of hock, Caspar."

"I declare, it is just like Don Quixote!" said Mattie, who preferred dialogue to narrative, "where everybody met at caravansaries and told the story of their lives. Never mind, it is my turn next. I mean to tell my vision," glancing defiantly at Miss McClane, who shook her head gently; "I do, indeed!"

"Just now Doctor Bellair has the speaker's chair," said Doctor Trevor, blandly; adding low to Mattie, "my example was a pernicious one, I see, but we cannot draw back yet; your '*vision*' will be the very thing for a climax, no doubt."

"I was lying off the Bermudas," said Doctor Bellair, "in my ship '*Albatross*,' when the remarkable delusion, if such it may be called, took possession of me, which I am about to lay before you. We had put in to St. George's, partly for water and partly to give the sick men some change of food and medicine, for we had recently come from the coast of Africa, and a low miasmatic fever was creeping among the crew, and our stock

of quinine was exhausted. I was surgeon on the 'Albatross,' and much worn out with my duties, and I got into a sleepless, nervous way, that was telling on my health. I would hang over the shipside half the night, thinking and dreaming, and reel to my bed at daybreak, literally half dead. But I was determined not to use opiates under the circumstances of impending disease, and brandy, which I was advised to try, only made me worse; so I waited for nature to react.

"They quarantined us at St. George, and we had but a dull time of it. One night, when the moon was at her full and every soul on board but the sentry was wrapt in sleep, I saw, approaching us, over the glittering seas, an object that, from the moment I perceived it clearly, froze my blood with horror.

"The seamen are a superstitious set, you know, and believe in signs and omens. I had always heard that the first man that saw a mermaid on a ship was doomed to die before the voyage was over. I have never cared very much for life when in health, but in my then nervous condition it came to seem of unreasonable importance to me, and I knew, that if I took that fever which I came in hourly contact with, and which I knew to be more or less infectious, I should never see home, country, or mother again. Therefore, when I saw that serene smiling creature with her dishevelled locks riding the waves towards me, I gave myself up for lost.

"The sentry passed me as she was careering by in the brilliant moonlight, not a hundred yards from the vessel. I clutched him by the arm. 'Stand,' I said, calling him by name, 'and tell me whether I am mad or sane. What is it you see to the larboard? Speak, man, speak!'

"‘I see,’ said he, ‘I see—O Lord, doctor! don’t ask me what I see. No good can ever come of it. Maybe it is a fancy of yours.’ This remark in itself proved the man was Irish, of course.

"‘Speak,’ I said, very sternly. ‘I command you to describe the object passing before us. What is that dreadful thing?’

"‘It is a woman with a harp in her hands,’ he said, shivering as if an ague fit were upon him. ‘She has long, black hair, her bosom is half unveiled, and her arms are bare, her waist is above the water; this is all. Now, doctor, dear, go to bed. It is not crazy you are at all; but keep this matter to yourself, for if the sick men get hold of it every man of them will die with the fright of it. We’ve seen a mermaid this night, Doctor Bellair, and it is one of us the doom will fall upon, but which, we can’t tell, you know.’

"I knew the poor, generous fellow was only trying to share my danger to keep up my spirits, for, as I have said before, the first man who sees the mermaid is the sufferer, according to maritime superstition.

"Nevertheless I obeyed him literally, and went to bed; but not to sleep, after the dreadful creature had drifted out of sight, smiling as she passed us, and smiting her fatal hamp!

"This much, at least, the smile and the music, must be credited to my imagination and the excited state of my nerves, for the next morning we heard that the British ship ‘The Wild Irish Girl’ had broken in two on the reefs, and her figure head floated under our boat and was hoisted on board before noon, to amuse the sailors.

"Sitting at this fair table, spread with fruits and wine

and radiant with beautiful and noble faces, you can little conceive, my friends, what relief was mine, when I recognized in the carved wooden image of Lady Morgan's heroine my malignant mermaid of the night before. But you must confess that appearances were deceptive."

"A capital story," said Professor Jau Jeune, "and very well told; but I believe I recognize it as an old acquaintance; all the better for that, however. I may be mistaken, though."

For a moment Doctor Bellair flushed hotly. He was sensitive on points of honor, however small; but the good-humored laughter that greeted Professor Jau Jeune's remark soon proved to him that he was only receiving a Roland for an Oliver.

"How many groans did that pay for, Jau Jenne?" asked Mr. Sinclair, who secretly resented Doctor Bellair's airs of travelled superiority.

"Nay, I was in earnest," said Jau Jeune, provokingly. "I think I can find that very story in a rather recent number of 'Harper's Magazine.' But I will not insist upon it under the circumstances."

"You had better not," said Bellair, low, between his set teeth, "or perhaps you may share the fate of one of your phalanæ or the scarabæus you so closely resemble."

"What is that you are muttering about, Doctor Bellair?" whispered Mattie. "Do be quiet and have a little common sense. The idea of quarrelling with that mummy. I am going to tell my vision now, and I don't care who disbelieves it, so that you credit it," and she smiled upon him a keen, glittering smile that pierced his brain.

She related with wonderful self-possession and considerable effect her clairvoyant dream in connection with Mrs. Howard's ring, which we have heard already.

"Did you see the face of the man distinctly?" asked Doctor Trevor, carelessly, when she had finished.

"No; a shadow was thrown over it," she replied, "like a filmy veil; but I saw that its contour was noble; and now, do you believe that I am indeed clairvoyante, and even gifted as a medium?"

"I cannot tell," he said, "it would certainly seem so. I have never tampered with such matters, never shall, unless impelled by the wish to accomplish some good, or correct some evil. I should be very sorry to develop such faculties in you, Miss Mattie Lynne. Believe me, your health would suffer from every process of the kind, and your fine, clear mind at last give way in turn if pushed too far beneath the nervous exhaustion consequent on such efforts.

"We will drop this subject, if you please, in our future intercourse, for your own sake. One question only: are you a natural somnambulist?"

"Once, when a very little child, they found me asleep perched on the housetop. I remember no other occasion or instance of my sleep-walking, and I hope this propensity will never return to me."

"I had meant to converse more with you to-day than I have had opportunity to do, but in the course of a few days I will call to see you, for, believe me, you have powerfully interested me, and we will have a long, quiet talk," said Doctor Trevor.

Mattie's face glowed with the pleasure of the surprise of this proposed visit, so unusual in the routine of that self-forgetting life, and she failed not to communicate this intention to all who would hear her at Madame de Winter's school.

Bets ran high, as to whether or not the doctor would fulfil his promise, and some of the girls were just beginning to pronounce it "one of Mattie Lynne's brags," when the well-known dark-green cabriolet drove to the door of the academy, and Doctor Trevor descending, asked for Miss Mattie Lynne alone.

He passed an hour in her society, but she failed to remark at the time, pleased and flattered as she was, how persistently he led the conversation to Mrs. Howard. He asked many direct questions as to the health and general well-being of that lady, questions which accorded little with his incurious turn of mind where individuals were concerned, and from the answers to which, flippant as these often were, he drew nearly all he sought to know.

That she was a widow at last was the principal source of thankfulness with him, for he had heard and seen enough of Howard to form some estimate of her sufferings, and the positive relief his death must be to her.

Before he left the parlor, he intimated his intention of visiting Lynnesborough on private business early in September, and offered himself as Mattie's escort from Briarheath, should the time suit her convenience, back to her academy, an offer on which she fastened many golden dreams, destined, like other castles in the clouds, to die with the sunset.

From a private conversation, which Miss McClane had with Doctor Trevor soon after Mattie's departure, she became convinced that he had no idea of addressing her. Indeed he made plain the purpose of his life to this tried and trusted friend, and more than ever did she feel desirous to see and judge for herself of Mrs. Hester Howard.

BOOK FIFTH.

A combination and a form indeed,
Where every god did seem to set his seal,
To give the world assurance of a man.—SHAKESPEARE.

I started to behold her, for delight,
And exultation, and a joyance free,
Solemn, serene and lofty, filled the light
Of the calm smile with which she looked on me;
So that I feared some brainless ecstasy
Wrought from that bitter woe had 'wildered her;
“Farewell, farewell,” she said, as I drew nigh.

We part! oh, Læon, I must dare nor tremble,
To meet those looks no more. Oh! heavy stroke,
Sweet brother of my soul! Can I dissemble
The agony of this thought?

REVOLT OF ISLAM.—SHELLEY.

BOOK

The first part of the book is devoted to a general survey of the history of the world, from the beginning of time to the present day. The author discusses the various stages of human civilization, from the earliest primitive societies to the modern world. He also touches upon the major events and figures that have shaped the course of history.

In the second part, the author focuses on the political and social developments of the modern era. He examines the rise of nation-states, the impact of the Industrial Revolution, and the challenges posed by modernization. The author also discusses the role of religion and philosophy in shaping human thought and behavior.

The third part of the book is a detailed study of the various cultures and civilizations that have flourished throughout history. The author provides a comprehensive overview of the achievements of ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, and the Middle East, as well as the contributions of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment.

Finally, the author concludes the book with a reflection on the future of humanity. He discusses the challenges we face in the modern world, such as environmental degradation, nuclear war, and social inequality, and offers his thoughts on the path forward for our species.

BOOK FIFTH.

CHAPTER I.

MATTIE CONFIDES AND CONSPIRES—THE SPOT ON THE SOUL—MRS. HOWARD “HOLDS HER OWN”—MR. MÜL-GRAVE “STANDS AND WAITS.”

THE August vacation brought Mattie Lynne back to Briarheath, which she once more considered her home, by tacit consent of all concerned, and she was naturally bubbling over with Ilium and of all its delights, chiefest of which she ranked, of course, Doctor Trevor.

“I spoke to him of you frequently, sister Hester, and I think he would like to see you on my account just now; but if he once knew you, matters might be reversed,” and she laughed archly.

“So he is a lover of yours, Mattie. Well, I hope the result may be fortunate.”

“Oh, no! not a lover at all; not yet, at least. Who could have hinted such a thing, when he is ever so many years older than I am, and merely friendly in his ways? What may be, is another matter, altogether,” adding after a pause, “you will see him in all probability in September. He has half promised to escort me back to school before the twentieth, when de Winter begins her fall session, and that will determine matters, I suppose.

I don't know what I should do were he to propose in form."

"Take him, of course, Mattie, for I see you are very much inclined that way already. But you are right not to let your feelings run away with you until you are certain of his intentions. Few girls have your self-control," and she thought of Melissa, and sighed.

"If it were not for the difference in names, and the fact that he never seemed to recognize the circumstances of my vision at all, or even your name when mentioned, I might suppose he was your California quack! Would you know him again were you to see him—that man I mean who rescued you from death and the doctors, in San Francisco?"

"I scarcely know whether I should or not, Mattie; I have just the dimmest perception of a sweet, grave face, that floats before me like a vision sometimes. The room was kept in shadow by his directions; besides I noticed very little at that time; I was in despair."

"Oh, I know, I know, the poor, dear little lambs! I wish they had been spared to you, sister Hester, I do, indeed."

"Don't, Mattie, don't!" and she paled and waved her hand, from some feeling beyond the girl's comprehension.

"I never will again, sister Hester, believe me," and she stooped and kissed the tender cheek, over which large, silent drops were streaming.

After a time Mrs. Howard rose, and taking a letter from her desk laid it on Mattie's knee.

"See how much there still is to comfort me after all, in this world of sorrow," she said, in a broken voice.

"The best, the truest friend I have ever known will

come to me in September to console me for your absence, and to pass the autumn and winter here for my sake. She has even engaged her passage on the first packet of that month, the 'Mount Hecla,' is not that the name of the vessel? Look, Mattie, for I am not sure."

"Yes, sister Hester, the 'Mount Hecla.' Why, you never told me before of this dear friend?"

"Some day you shall know all about my past, Mattie, and see her face to face, I hope, who is my best witness; but just now I thank you for your forbearance."

So there is something to tell after all, thought Mattie, glancing up from the letter at her sister, sitting unconsciously in her abstracted mood, still pallid and tearful.

"It is a lovely letter. Take it back, sister Hester. I wish I could write that way; but I can never make you understand by words half the affection I feel for you."

"I do not need words, dear, to assure me of your love; but hers is like a mother's; in strength, in purity, in disinterestedness, none other can approach it," and she quietly laid away the letter, wiping her eyes as she did so, and all unconscious of the jealous scowl that almost transfigured her sister's sparkling face.

When she turned again Mrs. Howard's face was calm, if sad, and she began at once to give forth some of the hospitable plans she had been quietly framing for the reception and entertainment of her beloved and fondly expected guest.

The money she had received from the sale of her book should be expended in fitting up a pair of rooms, still unfurnished, opposite to her own, a large and small apartment; the one as a bed-chamber, the other as a dressing room.

The furniture of the first should be superb and appropriate both, Hester determined, and a marble bath and dressing-stand in the last give consistency to the suite. Then there should be a book-case full of her own favorite authors (Mrs. Carisbrook's, she meant), among which Shakespeare, and Beaumont and Fletcher, and Massinger, and Ford should be numbered, not to forget Maturin and Congreve.

"Why, what a taste for the drama your friend must have," said Mattie, sharply; "is it not an unusual one at her age? Most old ladies, as I understand her to be, would prefer Miss Hannah More."

To this sally she received no answer.

Mr. Mulgrave returned about the end of August, and came directly to Briarheath.

Mattie was in the room when Kitty Cline came upstairs to her sister's chamber with his card, and was surprised at the agitation it occasioned. Yet her curiosity was none the less very keenly awakened to know with certainty to what to attribute this emotion. Love rarely betrayed itself exactly in that way, Mattie thought. Her sister was quick, irritable even, in dressing on that occasion, which was rare with her, so gentle usually, and spoke sharply once to Myra Clay herself, causing the clear, brown eyes of the child to be distended with amazement.

Her hands trembled, too, as she arranged her hair, for the ladies had been lying down on that warm summer afternoon in dimity bed-gowns, and had to make an entirely fresh toilet for the evening; but Mattie remarked no gladness in her face, no flush of pleasurable surprise, as when a lover comes.

On the contrary, her very lips were pale; those expressive lips which changed in hue with every passing emotion of her soul.

"I wish to heaven I knew what all this portended," quoth Mattie, mentally. "Does she love or hate this man? It is surely one thing or the other; or is she concerned simply about her money matters? I thought misers had thin, set lips and hooked noses. After all it may be avarice that is her ruling passion, physiognomy notwithstanding. I observe she is very cautious about her own expenses, rich as she is said to be, however; though liberal enough to us, even to brother Sutton and Sophia, where there is not a drop of her blood in question, nor much love lost either.

"Diamond studs and a full-jewelled watch for that poor starveling, forsooth, who has not spirit enough to grow his own hair, and a new Leghorn hat and Brussels lace mantilla for Sophia Sutton, and foreign furs, promised for next winter. Such inconsistency, when the stockings Sophia wears are darned into a state of transubstantiation, and would be repudiated as impostors by the very loom that wove them.

"As for me, very little, as yet, have I received beyond simple attire and my school expenses. Never mind, the time may come when I can afford to snap my fingers at all charity that does not begin at home. In the meantime it would be a real comfort to me to know how she and her attorney stand, for I have a fatal presentiment that if once my princely quack sets eyes on her lovely countenance all will be over, as far as I am concerned.

"And yet I know she would not take him from me, if she could, knowing how I prize him. I will do her that

justice: she is not grasping, if she is close about her own affairs; no meddler, nor wireworker, such as I have been used to all my life. Great heavens! why can't we choose our own sisters and surroundings? I want to know that, and where is the sense and justice of it all?" So saying, she arose, and before many minutes had come to her conclusions and resolutions.

She commenced by sending Myra Clay on some insignificant errand to Lynnesborough, for she dreaded instinctively the observation of that truthful child, mild detective as she was by nature, and unconscious of her own peculiar gift of penetration, which usually proved infallible.

Myra gone, with a sample of ribbon in her hand and a dime wherewith to pay for another half yard of the same article, Mattie felt relieved and equal to the emergency, for such she flattered herself it was.

"I have a right to know, and I will know, what it all means, if only for Melissa's sake," she murmured between her set teeth, as if to strengthen her determination to engage in the greatest degradation (so far) of her life, as she stole down a back staircase to ensconce herself, as a hearer and spectator both of what might pass in the library, in a closet beneath the stairs, used only, as far as she knew, for a depository of winter coal for the rooms on one side of the hall. Out of this recess opened two doors, one leading into the back hall and opposite the dining-room, which was always closed and darkened at this hour in summer time, and the other directly into the library, a room apart.

"Here I find myself listening and watching in a coal-hole and hospital for decayed brooms, mops and brushes

I find as well, when I should be called into full counsel," murmured Mattie. "But what was that Mr. Mulgrave was saying? Hah, let me hear!"

She had cajoled her own conscience and laughed down mentally her own scruples, while the mere preliminaries of conversation were going on; but when the lawyer, after a short pause, plunged boldly into "*medias res*," her very heart stood still, so intent was she not to miss one look, one syllable of what so profoundly astonished her.

"And now let me tell you that I saw Mr. Howard face to face several times, notwithstanding his refusal at first to receive me. I was determined to accomplish my business thoroughly and in person, not through intervention at all, especially that of a French attorney, between whom and myself an interpreter would have been required. The end of it is, he is once more at large, his debts all paid, the receipts are in this envelope for your inspection, and I hope approbation" (and he laid it on the table that stood between them with an air of self-importance). "They amounted to eight thousand dollars," he continued, "forty thousand francs (the sum seems a much larger one in their currency than ours); and the remainder of the ten thousand dollars I deposited safely with his banker to the credit of Mr. Howard. He understands perfectly that in consequence of this unforeseen anticipation and necessity of his, for so large a sum of money, his income for the next five years will be diminished to two thousand dollars per annum. I made this a condition before settling a single claim against him, and you will find his relinquishment of the two thousand a year, for the term of years stated, filed among those receipts, which I will ask you to keep carefully, or restore to me."

She pushed them, without examination, carelessly away from her.

"Keep them, I beg, Mr. Mulgrave," she said, in a sad and choking voice, "I have no wish to inspect them; you deserve every confidence from me, as well as much gratitude at my hands. I know not how to thank you for all your disinterested kindness."

She turned away tearfully.

"I never saw Mr. Howard looking better," he said, persistently. "The air of the gayest capital in the world seems to agree with him. He is absolutely fleshy and very florid. Then I am happy to tell you he has shaken off a great cause of annoyance, and probably *expense*, the incumbrance you know of, so that he can afford to live well on his diminished income. Yet he speaks confidently of spending his life abroad, although he inquired very particularly about you and your concerns, friends, etc., and jested—Mrs. Howard, I must tell you this, although it gives me pain to do so—*jested* on the subject of a divorce. There is a certain Russian princess, a 'grass widow,' as we say in this country, about twice your age and size, who at this time absorbs him, I am told. She is not attractive, but enormously rich and childless, and, in short—"

"Mr. Mulgrave, these details are positively repugnant to my feelings. I pray you forbear," she interrupted him passionately, with a flushed brow and waving hands. Mattie saw her clearly relieved against the window and pitied her; then leaning her head upon one hand, Mrs. Howard rested her elbow for a while on the table before her with shaded eyes, the other pressed against her heart, and again looked up after a few moments, calm, yet very pale.

"There is one thing I want to ask you about since the subject is open for this once (and I am very sure by no intention of yours to wound or offend *me*). Can you tell me what has become of that poor thing?"—she hesitated—"Miss Le Noir; she was a good girl once, though a weak one, and—and I feel for her. Do not think me unwomanly if I ask you to tell me all you know of that poor, lost creature."

Had Mr. Mulgrave obeyed the impulse of his soul (for he had one, reader, notwithstanding his satyrlike ears), he would have fallen down upon his knees at that moment before Hester Howard, and worshipped her as an angel, so profoundly did her unaffected generosity, accustomed as he was to the "tit-for-tat" style of women, touch and stir the very depths of his nature. Had she been less pure, less perfect, the effect would have been different of course; but for this seraph to stoop to pity fallen and degraded maidenhood was something so strange and so pathetic in his estimation that it bordered on the divine.

For a moment the man's feelings overcame him. He bowed his head in silence; not in pity for the fallen, (men, ordinarily, have no pity for such women; it is a mistake to give them credit for it; they are sluthounds after a wounded reputation, tracking it by its blood-drops), but in admiration for the compassionate spirit before him, in the shape of the only being he had ever idolized, the woman he still hoped to call his own.

"Madam," he said, quietly, at last, "it is not very much I have to tell you on that subject. Mlle. Le Noir is dead. She died in extreme poverty while Mr. Howard was confined in prison." He spoke with feeling and

with downcast eyes, for he felt the unfitness of the subject.

"Then it was by no direct fault of his, no treachery, no abandonment, she suffered?" she asked, eagerly. "You said something of his having cast off an incumbance. *What did that mean?*"

"Their connection had been dissolved some months before Mr. Howard's imprisonment. She was working for her living, I believe, respectably, as a shoe-binder, when sickness laid its grasp upon her. Her disease was rapid consumption, caused by privation, and it may be distress of mind as well. Her physician told me this; a man of rare feeling, who came to see Mr. Howard about her funeral expenses, for, small as these were, she left no means of defraying them. Her ornaments and her clothing were all gone, except the poor bed-gown she died in, and which served for her shroud. This physician had known her in better days in America—he was a countryman of ours—walking for a time the hospitals in Paris. It was in one of these he saw and recognized this once popular comic actress. She was brought in too late, however, for any possible aid, either from medicine or food, both of which she needed, and died a few days later at peace with all the world."

Mrs. Howard was powerfully affected by this simple narrative; her tears flowed fast and freely, and she covered her face with her handkerchief, sobbing audibly.

"All this in one little year!" she said, at last. "May God forgive them both, the greater as well as the lesser offender! What of those funeral expenses?" she added, after a long pause, looking up with renewed calmness, and speaking abruptly. "Spare nothing, Mr. Mulgrave."

"They *were* paid, after much cavilling and at first positive refusal on the part of Mr. Howard. Paid because Doctor Morris put him to shame about them, and insisted even by threats upon their being defrayed. The poor girl was buried decently, my friend informed me, and the threatened publication, for this was the rod he wielded, consequently withheld, a step which must have driven Mr. Howard away, even from corrupt Paris. Fortunately, the new-born infant perished."

"O God! This only was wanting to finish the long chain of his iniquity," she spoke with irrepressible feeling, forgetting all other presence than that of the Maker so grievously offended; and with her eyes cast up to heaven, her hands clasped, her lips dumbly moving, her face convulsed and pale, she sat for many succeeding moments lost in reverie. Nothing could have gratified Mr. Mulgrave more than this exhibition of indignation. It was highly satisfactory to this amiable attorney, also, to feel that she had drawn this bitter burthen of knowledge down on her own head, by inquiries that could not be evaded, or more delicately answered, than they had been by himself, and he sat very patiently waiting for the mood to pass, which he felt must be succeeded by a cold, enduring, and impassible indifference towards her offending husband.

"When such indifference becomes implacable aversion," he reasoned, "my chance begins: until then, patience! Let my services become indispensable, and I have the game in my own hands."

From her chink of observation, Mattie observed the expression of his face and attitude, and through these penetrated the secrets of his soul, while he sat uncon-

scious of human or divine scrutiny. Well had she said she could read countenances. Even in her hiding place she searched his heart, and thus philosophized :

"Sister Melissa, your chance is blue, as long as a single hope remains that this pretended widow may—go to grass! Mulgrave, I admire you for your strategy. Let us strike hands. I acknowledge you as a kindred spirit, an equal almost, and might have loved you instead of my adorable doctor, had we met earlier, and our young affections been disengaged, which at present they are not, that is certain. As for you, sister Hester, you are a bundle of deceit, I was about to say, lies; but I must think first about that matter. Surely such a husband as that was nothing to boast of, and to be deserted no cause of conversation, and old dolt-head Sutton may have just taken matters for granted, seeing no man about the establishment, and a black dress in constant requisition, though I thought from the first black silk and lace was funny second year's widow's mourning; but I knew that California fashions were set in the moon, or China, and did not attach so much consequence to that indication as a girl of my sagacity ought to have done. But how long, I wonder, is she going to sit silent in that frozen, despairing way? I declare it is dreadful what a skeleton in her closet this poor rich woman has had all this time, while I have been envying her wealth and freedom, and reproaching her for her frugality, and marvelling at her indifference to society. It is all explained now. She will end, of course, by shipping false Howard and marrying true Mulgrave, true to *her* at least, if false to Melissa, of whom he makes a catspaw! Well, probably she deserved it.

"One thing is certain. My doctor and I are safe, for that affair will be on and over long before the divorce can be obtained, and Mulgrave is pointing his game patiently, for he knows he will have to wait.

"In the meantime, Melissa is played with on his hook and line until the big fish is ready to take the bait; then away with the perch.

"After all may not Liss have been a thought too eager and confiding, and ought I or not to tell her what I have discovered?

"No; for my own safety, no; a thousand times no! I shall only try and discourage her as far as I can in a non-committal manner, all my own, I flatter myself, and urge the cause of Evans with renewed zeal.

"But let me hear what more she is going to say. There are signs of life visible, and Mulgrave gathers up his papers and bundles them, while she turns slowly round; gathers them up hypocritically, as a gambler might his cards, as if he had been occupied therewith, and shuts up the dead-lights of his face so as to conceal the fire within from the enemy's observation. What a mask the creature has at his command! How stony and impassive he looks, all passionate, staring, burning admiration, a moment since! How well he understands her! I declare this recess was a wonderful invention! It has saved me a great deal of troublesome investigation. A volume has been opened this evening that it might have taken years to read in the ordinary way. As it is, I have stereotyped it. Pretty well done for you, Mattie Lynne, after all, stupid as you have proved yourself as a clairvoyante."

Here Mattie softly unlocked the back door, preparatory

to her escape, which she knew must be made precipitately, if she expected to hear the last of the conversation, evidently drawing to a close.

"No use of being in a hurry yet," she thought, "for if matters come to the worst, and sister Hester found me in here even, groping among the brushes, it would never occur to her sanctified simplicity that I came for any purpose of *this* kind. She would think I was after the duster, and that would be the end of it; unless, indeed, she *should* have more of the detective about her than I imagine—like that poor, good, patient Parthenia, who was inspired for once to be sagacious just for my particular annoyance. Heigh-ho! this is a weary world, to be sure."

When again she applied her eye to the key-hole, after the absence of a minute from her post of observation, the actors in the little drama passing unconsciously before an astute if unsuspected spectator, had risen, and were about to separate.

"You will stay with me as my guest, I hope, while in this part of the country, Mr. Mulgrave? I believe your business never takes you farther than Lynnesborough in this region?"

"It is confined, on this occasion, entirely to your own affairs," he said, bowing.

"My sister Mattie is with me now, and Melissa will be here to-morrow, and I hope between them you will be able to pass your time agreeably."

"*Your* sisters must be pleasant, of course, to me," he said, significantly.

"Ah, that is very lover-like, as she must see," mused Mattie. "That is just the sort of reference Doctor

Trevor made to sister Hester's book, that touched me so.

"He tolerates *us*, it seems, because her father, Judge Lynne, happened to marry our mother, and made us kin in that way to his angel."

"I think you would be amused with Mattie," said Mrs. Howard, with straightforward frankness, seemingly or really quite unobservant of his marked manner, which was probably meant by him to set at rest all hopes on the part of Melissa. "She is very bright, and I think pretty, though not as decidedly beautiful, perhaps, as Melissa, at least not usually so considered. She is the youngest, however, and my especial pet, and she comes back from school laden with honors, which she bears meekly."

"As far as you know, Mrs. Howard," interpolated Mattie; "and as to being less beautiful than Melissa, satire itself could go no further than your sisterly remarks have gone. For a very little I would pass you both at a brush."

"In connection with this reference to your family," observed Mr. Mulgrave, now standing hat in hand, ready for his departure, "may I ask, whether or not you have thought fit to acquaint your friends, all, or any of them, with your mournful relations to—ahem—Mr. Howard?" smoothing his hat carefully as he spoke, and bending upon it all the weight of his visual organs. "When I last saw Mr. Sutton," he resumed, after a very brief hesitation, rather than pause, of which Mrs. Howard had not thought proper to take advantage, for she stood cold and silent before him, trying vainly to collect herself for a reply, "when I last saw Mr. Sutton, he spoke of your

widowed condition very decidedly, and as one having authority even ; but I did not know whether this mode of treating the matter had been agreed upon between you, or whether it really resulted from ignorance on his part. I ask for information, simply, and as a means of future guidance in my intercourse with these more or less curious friends of yours."

"When I am ready I will tell them everything that it concerns them to know, Mr. Mulgrave," responded Mrs. Howard, firmly. "Until that time, be good enough to remain silent about my affairs as far as you are in possession of them. Much escapes even your insight."

"Yet, in pure self-defence—for I have ever idolized the truth, and *not* as an abstraction merely—I must allege, that beyond an ambiguous expression in my first note to Mr. Sutton (purposely ambiguous, I do not hesitate to say, though veracious in every detail), I have never once referred to my husband, dead or living, in the presence of any one, except old Lora, since I came to Lynnesborough. In relating to my relatives the experiences of my life in California, I need a witness to sustain the truth of my assertions, and for her coming I shall wait, before making my revelation, due to them I feel as well as to myself. As to strangers, they must form their own conclusions to the end. I am not a beggar, Mr. Mulgrave, to show my canker in the marketplace."

He had not expected such feeling on a subject they two discussed so openly ; but he knew not how deeply humiliating to a woman organized like Hester Howard was such an alternative as confession of shame and deg-

radiation even as opposed to concealment and suspicious mystery.

Mr. Mulgrave replied only by an expressive bow to this outburst. "And now let me tell you, Mrs. Howard," he said, before leaving, "I have heard 'Falconbridge' spoken of everywhere as a splendid performance, and some garrulous people seem to have got hold of the author's name. I came very near being made a lion of lately for avowing that I knew the fair authoress of that popular book. I could have sold every one of your business letters, even at a high price, for the sake of the autograph, but—"

Mattie heard no further. Just at this moment, Kitty Cline, the Irish housemaid, came to the outer door of the recess, and turned the handle of the lock, which had been unfastened, suddenly, in quest of her spider-broom which stood there in tall and melancholy seclusion whenever out of use. Mattie crouched down behind the coal-bin, and hid her face in her hands. It was a moment of positive agony to her. She had not recognized the humiliation of her situation before. It flashed across her now in all its horror, as Kitty Cline peered in.

"It's so dark here, and the mistress in the library wid the door shut that side, of course! I can't see widout a light. Now, where in craation is the blamed Pope's head?"

"On his own shouwlders, I guess, Kitty Cline," retorted a merry voice outside, which Mattie recognized as that of the footman, James Sellers, at which sally of wit Kitty Cline laughed audibly.

"Now don't be after your foolin', but come here and help me feel for the spider-broom. It's webs they're

weavin' all the day and night, bad luck to them, industrious cratures that they is, and the misthress has an eye for them gray curtains, I tell you, that's about the quickest."

The man thus summoned approached. Mattie crouched lower and lower to avoid their groping hands; presently there was an explosion, a little scream, a struggle in the dark, and Kitty Cline fled precipitately with upraised hands after James Sellers, to inflict chastisement on his face, in revenge for the kiss he had stolen from hers. Their path lay towards the kitchen.

The diversion was a fortunate one for Mattie. She had just one moment in which to fly down a narrow corridor, and take refuge in a bath-room, before Kitty Cline returned to renew her search, alone this time, light in hand.

When Mrs. Howard went up-stairs a few minutes later, she met Mattie on the first platform, fresh as a naiad from her impromptu bath, and the sisters ascended the remainder of the broad staircase hand-in-hand together, talking cheerfully.

Nor was there anything in the manner of Mattie Lynne to betray either then or thereafter that she had been committing a felony of the very basest and most inexcusable description. For a thief may be a hungered, and a cold, and steal to supply these deficiencies, but a morbid and mean appetite for penetrating the mysteries of others presents no such claims to our sympathy and forbearance, and alone actuates the eaves-dropper. Since the time that the listening slave betrayed the sons of Brutus and Collatinus, up to this hour, no good has ever come of such household incendiaries.

Truth to tell, Mattie felt the degradation of her con-

duct very sensibly after all the flush of excitement was over, and she reflected on its ignominy and the disgraceful contiguity to which it had exposed *her*, one of Judge Lynne's daughters! To be cognizant of the coarse flirtation of a chambermaid and lackey was bad enough, but to owe to this her immunity from threatened discovery and disgrace was still worse, and worst of all was the consciousness that this humiliation was all for nothing, since, before many days, the secret would have been hers voluntarily, and by right.

It was in vain that she addressed herself in the accustomed language of sophistry, trying to delude her better sense into the belief that "it was only a good joke, something not to be thought of twice," and altogether "not worth the least consideration." Her cheeks and ears would burn even in the solitude of her own chamber, when she remembered her situation in the recess crouched behind the coal-bin, and shrinking from the light like a slave from the lash, or a deserter from the discovery of his superior officer.

CHAPTER II.

A CATASTROPHE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES—AN OPPORTUNE ARRIVAL—A CONCLAVE OF COMMONPLACES—CÆSAR COMES.

EARLY in September, a party of young people, matronized by the august Mrs. Peters in person, proposed a brief journey to New York and Niagara, in the programme of which pleasure trip Melissa and Mattie were included.

It was fortunately in the power of Mrs. Howard to indulge her sisters in this instance, and they prepared for a fortnight of travel and variety which would bring them to the time for Doctor Trevor's expected visit to Lynnesborough, "where his business brings him," said Mattie, pointedly, "and the understanding between us is, that he is to escort me back to Ilium."

"His business, I suspect very shrewdly, Mattie," said her sister, "is one with the object of which you are perfectly acquainted. Am I not right, dear?"

"Keep your secrets, sister Hester, and let me keep mine!" said the girl, defiantly, yet well pleased, secretly, that such motive should be assigned by any one to Doctor Trevor's advent.

Truth to tell, as the time for Mrs. Carisbrook's arrival approached, Hester Howard was glad to be alone, for it was without the presence of witnesses she desired to receive her friend. She had even summoned up the courage to postpone Sophia Sutton's threatened invasion for a ten days' visit until October, at which season, when matters should be settled again, she felt she could better bear, than in her state of nervous expectancy, the presence of that totally uncongenial spirit, and her brood of five badly-managed children.

Had she known, however, the state of mind produced by her kind note of postponement (not refusal), in which she frankly stated her reasons for wishing to be a while alone, and even the necessity of such a measure in her present excited condition, she would have hesitated before calling down such a storm on her unoffending head of bitter taunt and vituperation as left her step-sister's lips on the occasion.

Among other things, she declared her belief that it was sheer stinginess from beginning to end. Running on in this fashion :

"I suppose she begrudges me and my poor, dear lambs, what they eat at her table, for Kitty Cline makes no secret of saying that she lives off of a waiter when she is by herself, and gives her servants board-wages."

"Ample ones, no doubt, Sophia," meekly suggested Sutton, whose terror was a scene, "and surely it is a great saving of trouble and forethought to a woman who sets her heart so much on reading and studying."

"Oh, you and Mattie Lynne are crazy about that woman, I verily believe, just because she puts on airs of superiority ! Flirting with that lawyer, and her husband not dead a year ! Melissa says it's scandalous the set she makes at him, but he's past hope in love with Melissa, that's one comfort," and she laughed, bitterly.

"I saw no signs of either flirtation on her part or love on his for Melissa, when I was at the Briarbeath party the girls gave a week or two since. I thought matters were just reversed."

"What ! after that turquoise ring, and the note accompanying it ? Then the man's a villain !—"

"Not at all," interrupted Mr. Sutton, coolly. "He returns courtesy shown to him by one sister with politeness towards another, that is all. Melissa had better take Charlie Evans and be done with it. She will never get either Hairwood or Mulgrave. I am a cool, dispassionate judge of such proceedings, Sophia, as you know, and you had better advise your sister not to drop the substance for the shadow like the silly dog in the fable, who finally got nothing for his pains, you remember."

"Indeed I shall do no such thing, Mr. Sutton. I believe Mulgrave will toe the mark yet. Melissa expects to meet him at Niagara, and she'll come back engaged, you'll see, and Mattie may put up with Evans for her share. He'd suit her exactly, rich, handsome, and a fool. Nobody with a grain of sense could ever put up with that girl's capers, and she's smart enough for two."

"So she is, so she is," echoed the poor, down-trodden husband, "and as bright as a bird in June; and what a game to be sure she is playing! Why she winds the widow round her little finger. Take example, Sophia, and show no childish humors at whims you cannot control, and if I were you, my dear, I would never take all the children there at once again. My own, I say, can stay at home at any time; nor make another visitation of three weeks, as you did last Christmas, nor suffer them to pry into everything, pull flowers, tear books, destroy ornaments and china, as I have known them to do in your sister's house. It is really unendurable."

"Good heavens, Mr. Sutton, this is too bad," said Sophia, bursting into tears of rage, "to turn this way against your own flesh and blood, and take up for that sanctified hypocrite, Hester Howard" (sobbing bitterly). "When Harry broke his leg at her house last fall, did not she pretend the greatest affection" (sobbing) "for the poor, dear child, and sit up with him herself of nights" (sobs), "and feed him with her own hands" (sobs) "with all the dainties she could think of or procure" (sobs and sniffs), "playing the devoted, the deceitful Pharisee, just to enlist your affections" (short, panting sobs, evidently of condensed passion), "and now she has the face to decline our company, mine and Harry's, and

all, for some old Jezebel, no doubt, as all those mean foreign women are, and she knows she has gained you over and she thinks she can afford to snap her fingers in my face."

Prolonged sobs, during the performance of which Mr. Sutton quietly sneaks out of the door, and wends his way down the dirty streets of Sliding Stone, to seek the kindly refuge of his little dingy real-estate office, where he first draws a long, free breath.

It was fortunate, perhaps, for Mrs. Howard, that while her step-sister maintained this state of feeling towards her, a note from Miss Penelope Dean should have reached Mr. Sutton, which he deemed it his duty immediately to submit to his irate spouse, as by the persistence of this mood and the vow she had recorded on high while under its influence, Hester was spared the additional anguish of her presence, during a period of great suffering.

The note ran as follows:

"Miss Penelope Dean presents her sincere compliments to Mr. and Mrs. Sutton, and begs to apprise them of the very painful condition into which their relative, Mrs. Howard, has fallen (cataleptic in its nature, Doctor Paterson opines), since hearing of the loss at sea of the packet ship 'Mount Hecla,' due this week from Liverpool, in which a valued friend was expected by Mrs. Howard. The shock of this catastrophe has overwhelmed that estimable lady in the manner alluded to, and it is respectfully suggested that Mr. and Mrs. Sutton lose no time in adding their valuable assistance and counsel to the measures already pursued, but so far in vain, by her excellent and skilful physician.

"Old Lora declares her mistress to be in the same condition that endangered her life in California, and where

she was relieved by a conjuror, as the servant affirms, after her life had been despaired of by her regular medical attendant.

"The Misses Dean are at Briarheath, but find their services, so far, unavailing."

This note bore date of the morning, and Mr. Sutton determined at once to take the evening train for Lynnesborough, requesting the implacable Sophia to follow him next day.

In making this request he reckoned without his host, however. He found his wife inexorable, and strengthened in her determination by having, as she averred, "taken her Bible oath" to stand on ceremony with her offending sister, an irresistible point with him also, as she knew, as a church member.

"Good-by, Sophia, my dear," said Sutton, kindly, as he received from her unwilling hand the valise containing his change of linen, which he had desired her to prepare, "I regret that your oath stands in the way of your privilege, as a Christian, for this was a rare occasion to show forth the light that is in you; all the more, that if you only knew your own interest, or mine, or the children's, you would be sorry to hold back now. This is a crisis, perhaps, in our fortunes. Suppose your sister dies; those reticent, nervous people, you know—"

"Never die," interrupted Sophia, snappishly, "but if I were in your place, I would take diamond studs next time; one watch is enough, it seems to me."

"I am in the performance of a Christian duty, not seeking for reward," said Sutton, sanctimoniously, and with the recurrent snuffle with which he droned forth his prayer on occasions of exhortation; for he was a ruling

elder, and was called upon not unfrequently to supply the place of the missing Pharisees.

There was an actor once who painted himself black all over when he enacted the part of Othello, and declared he found inspiration in the consistency of his color.

Brother Sutton was a hypocrite of this order. He had grown so used to his own sophistry that he never admitted anything else, even to himself, and he went forth now with all the skin-deep enthusiasm of true chivalry to do battle, not for the cause of desolate womanhood, as he flattered himself, but to break a lance for mammon!

Had sister Hester been fretting her heart out for a foreign friend, under a pauper's shed, brother Sutton would, in all probability, have remained at home engaged in the discharge of his domestic duties, which as it was were cheerfully sacrificed.

Sliding Stone was a two hours' ride by express on the railroad from Lynnesborough, and what was called in that section "the Northern Train" swept through its principal street twice in the course of each day, like a fiery arrow.

It possessed, likewise, the advantage of an accommodation train, which stopped continually, like an inexperienced writer dotting his *i*'s or crossing his *t*'s, and dragged its slow length along for about one hour longer than the time occupied by its more energetic and expeditious compeer.

Mr. Sutton reached the depot just in time to flag the express, which signal was necessary to stay its impetuous progress, and like a mad bull it snorted and paused at the sight of the red rag just long enough to allow brother Sutton to leap on the platform, valise in hand, at

the risk of shattering his fragile pipestems, before it darted madly onward again.

He had staggered feebly to the only vacant seat he could perceive, and found himself the occupant of the same bench with a gentlemanly and handsome man, considerably younger than himself, and certainly far better dressed. He noticed at a glance that his companion *pro tem.* wore a seal ring, and had a well-cared-for and delicate hand, which had been flung carelessly over the back of the seat, when he took sudden possession thereof, being bounced into his place by the jarring of the car, as a nurse settles down a refractory baby in his chair, in a somewhat ludicrous style.

The hand was withdrawn just in time to escape being smashed by the meagre spine of the new-comer, who, naturally fond of humiliation, as it would seem, saw fit to apologize humbly for what he could not help.

"I hope, my good sir, I did not inconvenience you at all by dropping down so suddenly, but the truth is, the motion of the car is a thing I can never accommodate myself to, as some people do. I never could see how conductors kept their feet."

"It is all a matter of habit, of course," was the rejoinder, and the reticent arms were folded tightly.

"Don't you think some systems balance better than others?" continued Mr. Sutton, always fond of conversation and controversy.

"Well, perhaps so. I never thought of it before; but no doubt you are correct. A very large or a very small head might either of them be in the way of perfect equilibrium."

"Just so; you have my idea exactly; now if you will

remark," taking off his hat to show the truth of his representation, "my head is long and narrow, and my feet being also of that description, though running out in an opposite direction, there may result a certain discrepancy of circulation, which impedes a perfect consistency of action between the two extremities of my person. I do not know whether I have made my idea plain to you," with a watery smile.

"I think I know what you mean," said the stranger, politely, inclining his head slightly, but with an expression of face so cold and even dreamy that it invited no continuance of the subject under discussion.

"You have a beautiful country here," he said, at last, rousing himself as if from reverie. "May I ask how many stations we shall touch before arriving at Lynnesborough?"

"Only two. Now the accommodation stops everywhere, and when my business is urgent, as it is to-night, I always take the express, but I believe I prefer the motion of the slow train. It suits my temperament somehow."

"I should suppose so," with the slightest possible shade of irony, quite unperceptible to its object, however, who continued to gurgle forth his tepid remarks despite the evident weariness of his companion, like some sickly tea-kettle.

"You have travelled far to-day, sir, I suppose?" he said, at last, after ineffectually beating about the bush for something like a reciprocity of remark on the part of his silent neighbor.

"Since yester morning uninterruptedly. I am but dull company, I know, travel-worn as I feel, but I shall

soon reach my stopping-place. Is there a fair hotel at Lynnesborough?"

"Pretty fair—pretty fair, considering, as to *fare*, I mean," replied Mr. Sutton, smiling, and stooping down, after a fashion he had, to conceal his consciousness of having perpetrated a pun, by caressing one of his long, lean shanks to which feet were appended, shaped like cantelope seeds. "Old Whistlethwaite can make you down a comfortable bed, and give you a good square meal on very short notice. Have you relatives in Lynnesborough, may I venture to inquire?"

"No, not even acquaintances with one exception. Do you know, by-the-by, anything of a Miss Mattie Lynne, of Lynnesborough? I believe the town derives its name from her progenitors."

"Mattie Lynne? Why, my good sir, she is my wife's half-sister, and makes her home with me at Sliding Stone, or did, until another half-sister of hers came back from California, and bought the old Lynne property, Briarheath, and fitted it up in handsome style with my assistance, and—ahem—advice. You have come to the right person to ask about the Misses Lynne. There is another, you see."

"Mrs. Howard is a widow, I believe?"

"Yes, yes, poor thing; and very ill just now, she is! I have just been summoned to her bedside, and my informant, a most respectable maiden lady and intimate friend of hers, Miss Penelope Dean, considers her in imminent danger; such, also, is the opinion of Doctor Hubbard Patterson, one of our first practitioners. She is cataleptic."

The last words were uttered in an undertone, imply-

ing the most solemn recognition of something very awful and mysterious in their import, but their effect on the countenance of his now attentive companion was not noted by Mr. Sutton, for at that moment an unhappy cow, who had disregarded the warning whistle, truly the last trump to her, was whirled aloft by the cow-catcher, and lay a shapeless mass on the roadside.

This incident engrossed Mr. Sutton's whole attention for some moments, but was totally unheeded by the stranger, who sat engrossed in thought for the rest of the journey, parting politely with his "*compagnon de voyage*" at the Lynnesborough depot, whence he wended his way, portmanteau in hand, to the principal hotel of the village.

"I thought he was some person of distinction from his manner and appearance," mused brother Sutton, half-contemptuously, as he watched the retreating form of his late companion bearing his own light luggage, "but now I know he is nothing but a drummer, or mayhap, still worse, a preacher on his circuit! I thought he was a sugar planter, at least."

After partaking of some refreshment and renewing his toilet very expeditiously, the stranger inquired the way to the residence of Mrs. Hester Howard, whither Mr. Sutton had gone immediately on his arrival at Lynnesborough, and to the astonishment of that gentleman he followed fast on his footsteps.

A newsboy passed him on his solitary way to that suburban residence, and as he was crossing the lighted court-house square, crying out in his high and piercing tones the contents of the paper he offered for sale.

"More news from the Mount Hecla! All New York

in mourning! Not a soul saved except the captain, and one cabin-boy!"

"Bird of ill omen," he thought, "what is that ship to me, so that my bark of hope be not foundered in the deep waters! How selfish my anxiety makes me. O God! permit me in Thy great providence to rescue her once more, and I shall be content to die!" He little knew how vitally the loss of that fated ship was affecting the object of his deep solicitude.

It was nine o'clock when he reached the door of Briarheath, and rang the bell, which pealed sonorously through the house.

The upper story was dark, but there were lights below, and soon in answer to his inquiry and demand to see the inmates of the house, whoever they might be, he was shown into the lighted library, where he found an assemblage of sorrowful faces, among which he recognized at a glance that of his late travelling companion. The recognition was simultaneous, and Mr. Sutton advanced with more than his usual alacrity to receive the stranger, who, hat in hand, stood on the threshold of the door.

"I am sorry to inform you, my dear sir, that the object of your visit (Miss Mattie Lynne, no doubt) is absent at this time, as is her elder sister, Miss Melissa! Come in, however, and sit down amid our sorrowing circle, for, alas! we have every reason to believe that the luminary of this mansion will shortly be extinguished!" whispering these last words in accents that reached every ear in the otherwise silent apartment.

"Mrs. Howard is sinking fast, I am sorry to inform you. Ahem!"

After imparting this information to the still and im-

passible-looking stranger, Mr. Sutton stood wringing his hands, and alternately rising on his toes and subsiding gently again to a more stable condition for several minutes, at the expiration of which time he ventured gently to renew the subject, evidently with no very hospitable intention.

"You will see at once, my dear sir," he resumed, "that the object of your visit is defeated for the present by the inopportune absence of Miss Mattie Lynne, to whom, on her return, it will give me much pleasure to hand your name or card, if you will be good enough to confide either one to my safe-keeping."

To the surprise of all present, the stranger took no further notice of this address than to calmly enter the library, deposit his hat and gloves on the centre table and seat himself beside it, partly, as it seemed from his excessive pallor, to obtain needful rest.

"Is there a medical gentleman present?" he inquired at last, in calm, clear accents; "if so, I should be glad to speak with him apart."

"I have the honor to represent the profession of medicine in this assembly," observed the occupant of one of the great gothic chairs of the library, who sat, staff in hand, portly and self-poised as a justice of the peace of the olden time.

"It is with you then that I would confer medically," said the stranger, suddenly rising.

"I am sorry not to be able to grant your somewhat indiscreet and off-hand request," replied Doctor Patterson, bowing benignly from his mediæval gothic throne, and planting his cane before him resolutely. "I should be doing injustice to the noble profession I represent to

accord a privilege like that to one of whom I, so far, know nothing! Any questions, however, that you see fit to put to me before this company, shall be truthfully and freely answered, as far as medical propriety permits. I presume you wish to inquire, for some reason, particularly into the condition of Mistress Howard?"

"I do. Tell me then, to begin with, is Mrs. Howard perfectly conscious at this time?"

"Perfectly! that is the worst of it; a little delirium, even, would have been a desirable symptom in her case, giving me at least an opportunity of taking control of her condition, which now I cannot venture to do at all. Concerning her obstinacy these ladies will bear me witness."

"Will one of them be good enough to give my card to Mrs. Howard?" interrupted the stranger, irreverently. "My business with her is urgent, and cannot be delayed."

"Business at such a time as this? Oh, it cannot be thought of, my good sir," said old Mr. Steinbach, advancing to the front and taking up the thread of discourse; "you have not properly comprehended, perhaps, the case of this dear lady, sick from grief at the loss of her friend, and quite unable to rise up from her pillow, or even receive for days her best acquaintances. Her lawyer and her doctor have alone had access to her."

"The law makes a very good will, I suppose, in her case," said Mr. Sutton, absently, perhaps. "I have not suggested the matter at all."

"I am a physician myself," pursued the stranger, "and not without extended experience in nervous disorders. I shall not push my demands on the time or strength of Mrs. Howard beyond propriety. If Dr. Patterson would

do me the favor to bear my card, in person, to her chamber, he would oblige me. I think I can answer for it that the consequences will not be unfavorable to her."

"Are you a relative of her English friend, the lady she was expecting on the 'Mount Hecla?' asked Doctor Patterson. "If so, there can be no objection, I suppose."

"I cannot claim that honor," responded the self-announced physician, courteously, "nor even the pleasure of that lady's acquaintance."

"Perhaps you represent Mr. Mulgrave, Mrs. Howard's attorney?" observed Mr. Sutton, interrogatively, and somewhat eagerly.

"I represent no one," replied the stranger, "but I claim to be the possessor of a faculty, or Divine gift, I may perhaps presume to call it, which before now I have found useful to those afflicted with insomnolency; the power to command sleep through magnetic passes, and I ask permission to exercise this soothing influence in behalf of this afflicted lady. My name is Trevor, and my residence is Ilium, New York. I heard casually in coming to Lynnesborough this evening of Mrs. Howard's desperate condition, and have come to offer my services in memory of some past associations in this extremity. I have once before," he hesitated slightly, "under similar circumstances, proved beneficial to Mrs. Howard; that was when we were both exiles, as it were, on the far Pacific coast."

"Oh, do take Doctor Trevor up-stairs without further delay, my dear Doctor Patterson," said Miss Sophronia Dean, clasping both hands in a sentimental manner.

"Don't hesitate, dear doctor," echoed Miss Penelope, the elder and more didactic, and decided of these tall,

thin, elderly and perfectly lady-like specimens of single-blessedness, who clung so pertinaciously to Mrs. Howard in sickness as in health, that in her own despite she was obliged to admit them to a sort of spurious intimacy.

"I would prefer that my card should precede me," said Doctor Trevor, taking for granted the consent of the elder physician to his request, backed as it was by the instance of two such experienced ladies and close friends as the Misses Dean, the entreating looks of Mr. Sutton, and the anxious glance of Mr. Steinbach, who walked or rather hobbled up and down the room nervously, with his hands behind him, a pinch of snuff between the thumb and forefinger of the right, which from time to time he thrust up his roomy nostrils, then returned to their pristine position without interrupting his promenade.

"My dear sir," said Doctor Patterson, pompously, planting his cane firmly before him and leaning upon it with both hands heavily, while he confronted Doctor Trevor with a majestic frown, "do you know what it is you demand? A virtual concession on the part of the science of medicine, represented by me, to the art of charlatanry or empiricism, as represented by you. Now this is not a personal matter at all; it embraces great principles, and *prodigious* issues, as you perfectly understand, being, as I perceive, a man accustomed to the usages of medical etiquette, and a—yes, a gentleman (I think I am safe in using this expression in this connection?") glancing round for the approval of the company at large, and so losing the effect of the slow, satiric smile that curled the well-formed lips of Doctor Trevor, as this "pronunciamento" went forth; met as it was, by a bow of recognition from Mr. Sutton, a courteous wave of the

hand from Miss Penelope Dean, a simper from Miss Sophronia, and a sudden cessation in his troubled walk and a lurid glare behind his spectacles from old Mr. Steinbach.

"A gentleman! That splendid man anything else!" he questioned, half aloud.

Doctor Trevor stood leaning with one hand in a careless attitude on a marble table. The other was thrust into his coat bosom, not fiercely at all, as if seeking for a pistol or stiletto, but as if for mere support. Yet his face was more than usually pale and concentrated in its expression. He was one who grew cold as he grew angry, and concealed agitation under the mask of indifference most frequently.

"Your determination, Doctor Patterson! Let me hear it at once. Do you decline to practise with me on the grounds you have stated, or shall we act conjointly in this case?" asked Doctor Trevor, firmly.

"Patience, patience, my dear sir," said Doctor Patterson, lifting up his cane with both hands, then plunging it suddenly again into a hole he had already contrived to bore in the India matting; "let us pursue this discussion cautiously and without any loss of temper on either side. We represent opposing interests in which humanity itself is at stake, and the least concession on my part might be fatal to the cause of science, as a slight divergency in the orbit of a planet, insignificant in itself, might be the cause of ruin to the whole solar system. Ahem! Now to begin," and Doctor Patterson quietly planted himself afresh.

With a shrug of his shoulders almost worthy of a Frenchman, Mr. Steinbach thrust the last of his pinch

of snuff into his capacious nostrils, and hobbling across the room while he muttered to himself, rang the bell with considerable violence.

The footman, James Sellers, answered the imperative summons.

"Send the housemaid here," said the indignant German; "a gentleman is waiting to send up his card to Mrs. Howard, and this privilege he shall not be denied."

- "I will take it to the door myself," said James Sellers, "both of the women are with the madam just now."

Comprehending the nature of the interference at once, Doctor Trevor mutely extended his card, and before the astonished group could recover their composure James Sellers was on his way with the objectionable missive to the chamber of his mistress.

"You will bear me witness," said Doctor Patterson, recovering first from his stupor of astonishment, and glancing around the apartment while he extended his hand to each one of his audience in succession, "you will severally and conjointly bear me witness that I opposed this intrusion on the broad grounds of medical jurisprudence alone, not from any selfish motives, or personal objection to this individual, or *personage*, I had better say, perhaps," in a pompously sarcastic tone. "But if the boundaries of propriety be exceeded at the suggestion of a foreigner and an interloper, who takes the precedence of honored friends and relatives, I have no more to say, of course, and must gracefully retreat from my premises."

Here he bowed, smiled, waved his hand, and plucking up his staff, threw himself back in a nonchalant attitude in the great morocco chair he occupied, near which Mr.

Sutton seated, or rather poised himself on the edge of another and similar one, in a drooping attitude, feet and hands placed severally closely together, and head bowed forward, very much in the position he assumed in his pew on Sundays. "His turkey-buzzard pose," as Mattie called it, maliciously as well as merrily.

The Misses Dean, secretly well pleased at the prowess of Mr. Steinbach, and the success of the visitor so far, sat quietly on a sofa apart, waiting in their usual non-committal way for the result of the application to the higher powers; and Doctor Trevor himself, with an apparent certainty as to the result of the errand of James Sellers (singularly provoking to Doctor Patterson), maintained his impassible attitude and expression, and seemed to ignore entirely what was passing around him.

"Cool!" said Doctor Patterson, aside to Sutton, to which suggestion that worthy responded by two or three short, emphatic bobs of the head, each lower than the last, without looking up from the floor on which his eyes were riveted.

"The gentleman will please walk up-stairs," said James Sellers, opening the door wide, and revealing Lora waiting without.

With a slight diffusive bow, Doctor Trevor withdrew, to follow the old servant to the chamber of the invalid.

"*Devilish* cool!" repeated Doctor Patterson, straightening himself in his chair, and bringing down his cane emphatically. "Out of common civility he might have requested *me* to accompany him."

"Or me, her near relative," said Mr. Sutton, pinching up his lips.

"Or one of *us*, for propriety's sake, perhaps," echoed

the Misses Dean, "though, indeed, we shall feel well repaid for all the rebuffs we have received in our frequent and well-meant offers of assistance," pursued Miss Penelope, alone, "if this strange physician should succeed in promoting the comfort of our incomparable friend, or saving her valuable life, and restoring her to usefulness."

"I like him much," said old Mr. Steinbach, tapping his huge tortoise-shell snuff-box, preparatory to another elephantine pinch. "His deportment is grave, dignified, unobtrusive, proud, and courteous both. He seems a man not flatterful at all, but simple, true and great, and surely no marble bust was ever more correctly handsome than he. I have seen no aspect more serenely beautiful—not Goethe's own. I am impressed with this man's aspect, and that he should go alone into the chamber of sickness, when his vocation is a peculiar one, appears to me no more than plainly proper, not a matter of choice at all. Those magnetic passes are seldom successful when the attention of the patient is distracted," and again he tapped his box approvingly.

"Magnetic humbugs!" ejaculated Doctor Patterson, fiercely, rising and seizing his hat. "I will not stay another minute in a house where such chicanery is proposed and practised with the aid and assistance of unscrupulous dependents. Sutton! it is *your* duty to eject that man—that quack I mean—from these premises; that is, if you respect me, and value your sister's life; but I have no more to say at present. Good-evening, ladies. Good-evening, Mr. Sutton."

Marking in his farewell and egress his complete contempt for Mr. Steinbach, or ignorance of his existence,

to which that worthy musician and true-hearted man responded only by another of those significant shrugs, which foreigners alone can execute, expressive of indifference, contempt, or distrust, and perhaps a little ridicule.

So Doctor Patterson was off in a whirlwind, while Doctor Trevor was throwing oil on the troubled waters of a stormy soul, and breathing peace above physical distraction.

CHAPTER III.

“OUT OF THE DEPTHS”—A LIFE-HISTORY—AN OBSTACLE.

A WEEK after the first interview between Doctor Trevor and Mrs. Howard, she was sitting in her chamber in the great dimity-covered chair that had been her mother's, dressed in her white morning-gown and cap, literally “clothed and in her right mind,” still, pale and sad, and weak, but entirely composed and calm, and conversing with interest on every subject with her new physician.

The disguising and disfiguring beard had been swept away, before he came to visit her at the first, and the face, indelibly imprinted on her memory and even imagination, as she had not supposed it to have been, had been recognized at a glance in all its marble serenity of feature.

Few words had been interchanged between them on that first meeting; but she had involuntarily surrendered herself to his influence from the moment of recognition,

and as he stood above her, pale, majestic, benign, extending over her pillow his slowly waving hands, whose powerful and perfect mould alone might have indicated the character of the man, he looked like a guardian saint watching over and blessing the apotheosis of a holy martyr. But there was no one to witness this pure and pathetic picture save the simple slave-woman, Lora, who, bowed down in affliction, understood alone that means were being employed by which her mistress might be saved—means which had before proved successful; and in this thought she was utterly wrapped away from all external effects.

This scene had been repeated seven times and with the same success since the first endeavor, and Doctor Trevor was proposing now to leave the completion of the cure, so far encouraging, in the hands of nature. He thought sleep would soon become a natural visitor once more, and though he promised himself to linger yet a few days at Lynnesborough and so fulfil his promise of escorting Mattie back to Ilium, he deemed his present usefulness at an end, as far as Mrs. Howard's health was concerned.

"Besides," in speaking to her of this, he added, "the business on which I came to this region is still incomplete, and I may be compelled to leave it so; but I hope to know at least what tenure I hold on a treasure I would fain possess before I go home again. I would fain ask—" he hesitated; she looked into his face calmly with her deep sweet eyes, fountains of light to him ever, and there was something in the tone of his voice, in the expression of his face, that indicated as plainly as words could have spoken it, the nature, if not the object, of his mission.

"Is it Mattie?" she asked, hesitatingly, and smiling faintly; "if so, do not fear to speak to me at once. I know how highly she regards you. I know, indeed, or rather I have suspected—"

"Not another word," he said, laying his hand lightly on her own, for he wished to hear no more, and speaking in a husky tone, quite unusual to him, "not another word about Mattie, I implore you. You have misconceived me very strangely indeed, if you have not discerned the truth; but of that another time. You are too feeble now to hear it, too sad, perhaps."

She understood him now; it was impossible she could do otherwise, for his quivering lips were pressed upon her hand, and she felt tears streaming over its polished surface—tears such as men shed but once in a lifetime; tears such as baptize in rapture the souls of the women who cause them to flow.

She did not speak or stir, or struggle to withdraw her hand from his embrace. Time enough for all that; time treading close on happiness, for with a few words of simple truth this Eden dream must be dispelled, and life again be bared to her in ghastly loneliness.

Yet in that brief moment of delight her mind surveyed her past with that glance of power that, like the soul's retrospect at the judgment day, sweeps before it all the secrets of a lifetime. She had loved him, she felt it now, from the very hour when his presence diffused such balm over her wrung spirit in California; loved him without even the recognition of such a presence.

It was this unconscious passion that had kept her apart from evil and vanity all her days—she felt this now—which had nerved her to bear, and to struggle, and to

cherish all sweet and beautiful charities, and unconsciously to nourish *hope*, which seemed to her own outward observation the one thing utterly wanting in her life. This nestling of her soul, this strangely implanted affection, burst its bonds now and put forth suddenly its nascent wings, and she watched it soar a moment in its rare and glorious beauty before she should fling it forth forever as a freed bird, away on space. For what could she be to this man, or he to her, beyond the friend of an hour? What *dared* she be?

"You do not speak to me," he said, suddenly looking up, "you do not speak to me, yet I feel that you understand me, and your silence, your forbearance, and the expression of your planetary eyes, all confirm the earnest hope I cherish. Yes; it is yourself I covet, Hester Howard, none other! I have loved you from the day I saw you at your cottage door, with your infant in your arms, and your boy clinging to your white garments, the embodied dream of a lifetime. So long ago as this I worshipped you, purely, sacredly, truly, afar; but when you lay before me in the loss of these children in your pale beauty in California, crushed, despairing, dying, dependent on me alone for solace, and for succor, from the very grasp of death, this love was fanned to passion. I saw you in unworthy hands, from which I could not then rescue you, bound as I was myself by ties as inextricable at that period as your own, for I too was married then to a woman for shame of whom I had dropped my very name; a woman forced on me by irresistible circumstances, or such as seemed so once; never loved by me, it is true, but treated ever with a care and tenderness that merited different returns. All this you shall

know later and from proof, if such be needed, beyond my own assertion. But let that pass for the present; we are free and we love each other, and I offer you the devotion of a life hitherto untried, unfilled. Speak to me, Hester!"

"Not now," she said, "not now. When I am stronger, when I see my way clearer, I will write to you, and tell you all. In the meantime come and go freely during the few days of living intercourse that remain to us, for hereafter we shall meet as ghosts, if indeed we meet at all, and the joy of our present be buried among the wrecks of our past."

"You speak in enigmas," he replied. "I do not understand you; if I have mistaken your sentiments for me, presumed too far, rebuke me at once, and do not spare my feelings, nerved now to the utmost."

He rose, he paced the floor; she followed him with her mournful, straining eyes.

"What is this cloud which seems to rise between us, and envelop us in the folds of its mysterious sadness even at the very outset of our joy?" he asked, suddenly pausing in his rapid walk; "answer me. I can bear it better now than at any future period of our intercourse. Do you not love me, Hester?" he asked, approaching her with outstretched hands. "Have I dreamed a dream of the night to awaken at daybreak forlorn—my vision broken?"

"Love you? oh, yes, I love you," she replied, "truly, deeply, fervently, and for the first time in my life. I have always loved you, Mordaunt, since I knew you, instinctively loved you. I feel this now; but there are obstacles between us that I cannot speak of now; cannot remove, without, without—"

As she spoke her arms fell nervelessly at her side, her eyes closed, her lips relaxed, a deathlike pallor chilled her face to stone—a spell of suffering, from which she revived slowly, only to sink again into a condition of nervous ecstasy.

Doctor Trevor reproached himself bitterly for an impetuosity of conduct strangely at variance with the habit of his life, and promised himself superior caution and reticence for the future. Again in the exercise of his power he lulled the excited nerves of her he loved; and again in her recovery basked in the wan renewed sunshine of her sweet and tender eyes and languid smiles, while in the delicious security of weakness she leaned upon him as a pillar of strength, and enjoyed to the utmost his faithful and gentle ministry.

Another week like this passed by, before Mattie came; during which, hour by hour and day by day, the love she had meant to put aside forever gained fresh ascendancy—grew strong, and struck deep roots into her being, and shaped itself to passion, equal, if not surpassing in intensity (even as her temperament was an exaggeration of his own), the sentiment Mordaunt Trevor cherished for her—a sentiment on his part so deep, reverent and true, that it dared not, even in imagination, surpass the boundaries of severe respect.

In the very purity of a woman's nature lies most often her danger; for, strong in the singleness of her motives, she yields herself at times to a sweet abandon of affection, that a man conscious of his imperfections dares not indulge in. With his recent resolves fresh at heart, and trembling for the health of the woman he idolized, Doctor Trevor referred but rarely, during these last days, to

the passionate affection that lay close at his lifespings. He had promised himself to be patient, and to wait silently for her explanation, still necessarily deferred; and he felt it sufficient for the time being to watch the light returning to her eyes, the color to her lips, to know that she loved him, and to minister to every physical want with the unfailing vigilance of combined skill and affection.

Had he spoken the words then that he manfully restrained, she might have impetuously resigned for him home, honor, happiness, unless, indeed, his affection had sufficed to insure the last and repay her for all other losses. For she loved this man with the love of such peculiar organizations—a love, real as life, strong and irresistible as death, eternal as heaven itself.

Perhaps had he guessed all this he might, like other men, have loved her the less, for that her love so powerfully exceeded his own, and cooled in his devotion towards her in proportion as she warmed to him; but, like most impassioned and high-strung people, she possessed the reticence that is given to such beings, as a necessary armor against, and compensation for, other infirmities. She kept down her emotions, even in her weakness, to that just level that is recognized universally by the name of "*womanhood*;" and if I lift a corner of the veil that concealed her martyrdom, it is that you may admire and not deride, oh reader, the mighty and victorious struggle that went on beneath it.

Reflect, in extenuation of this infatuation of hers, that this woman of genius, developed late, and suffering early, knew now for the first time in her life that unspeakable joy that usually once at least crowns the brow of youth;

and that this revelation came to her at a period when maturity had strengthened emotion and experience shown her the emptiness of all other sources of enjoyment.

Reflect, also, that religion was still a sealed book to her soul, where imagination reigned in desolate splendor and despotism. Pity this woman, widowed if a wife! bereft if once a mother! knowing fame only as a mockery and a thorn; a patient priestess at the altar of happiness, for whom no fires had yet been kindled, waiting, watching in the shadow! Pity, and blame her not, if for all recompense and compensation for the anguish of her past, the desolation of her present, she was content to snatch one heart from the whirl of existence to be her only meed, her sole domain, her kingdom, her reward! It was during these days of her slow and blissful convalescence that Doctor Trevor laid before her some passages of his life which bore directly on the present and future of both parties.

He was the son, he told her, of Catholic parents, though himself a Protestant. His mother was a Mordaunt, and he had been chiefly educated in the house of her father, a clergyman of the Church of England, and a man of the purest principles and finest attainments.

The conversion of his mother to Catholicism had drawn a line of coldness between father and child, and it was principally with a view, perhaps, to conciliating her estranged parent that Mrs. Mordaunt consented that he should rear her son, secure at the same time in the consciousness of his ability to perform this task nobly.

The select school of Eric Mordaunt was esteemed one of the best in England, and as Ernest Trevor was blest with a numerous family, and restricted to small means

of sustaining them, it was not difficult for his wife, notwithstanding his religious prejudices, to persuade him to permit the grandfather of *her* favorite boy to assume the burden of his education and expenses.

Thus Mordaunt Trevor was reared apart from his own family, of whom he was the eldest, if we except a son, by a first marriage of Mr. Ernest Trevor's, much older than himself, and who had been early dedicated to the Catholic Church by his own selection.

It was during the prevalence of a fatal epidemic that Mordaunt Trevor was called home, for the first time for years (save during the brief continuance of Christmas and midsummer holidays), to see his mother and three of her children expire, and to aid his father and elder brother in their efforts to save the lives of the four younger remaining children, fortunately successful.

He was now for the first time thrown into intimate intercourse with his half-brother, Ambrose, and before many days surrendered himself with all the abandon of youthful confidence to an influence more delightful and irresistible than any that had ever before been exerted over his imaginative nature.

In addition to manners of the most gentle and insinuating sweetness and a voice of the rarest melody, Ambrose Trevor was gifted with personal beauty of a strange and dazzling type.

His golden hair, violet eyes, and radiant complexion, united with the perfect symmetry of his features and the sweetness of his expression, gave him the exterior of an angel. This radiant countenance diverted attention at first, in most instances, from the painful circumstance of his physical deformity. His figure, small and im-

perfectly put together, with its high shoulders, long arms, and disproportioned length of limb, impressed the experienced eye after scrutiny, as the result of spinal disease, and was terminated by slender feet, lame and stiffened in some way, but what, it was difficult to determine. It was long before—by mere accident, and not without a certain horror—Mordaunt Trevor discovered that one of these was clubbed; the deficiency being artfully supplied by the mechanism of a boot constructed on the continent, where artisans of skill abound, and where Ambrose Trevor had received his education.

It was through the persuasions of this relative that Mordaunt Trevor determined to pursue the profession he had selected abroad. Italy offered in the seclusion of one of those far-famed occult colleges, in which medicine is treated less as an open science than a holy mystery, inducements to his imaginative temperament. The very gift he possessed, of "the laying on of hands," seemed to point to some peculiar mode of medical training, and the imagination of the youth was kindled by the representations of the older man, whose rare attainments and felicity of expression befitted him well to gain empire over the minds of his youthful compeers.

The father of these brothers bore little resemblance to either son. It was from their mothers that each one had inherited his peculiar coloring and style of features, and probably as well the tone of his mind and disposition.

Ernest Mordaunt, the father, was, at the time we write of, a stern, sad, sallow man, of fifty-five, tall and thin, black-eyed, and intensely black-haired, save where threads of silver mingled therewith, and with a long, narrow visage, rarely illumined with a melancholy smile of singular but saturnine sweetness.

He was a self-engrossed student, who had been content to let his purposeless life glide away in the shadows of his library, never improving his small patrimony, and as his family increased more and more, retrenching his expenditures, until at last a frugality bordering on parsimony had become the law of his narrow household; the law not of choice, but stern necessity.

One master passion alone held possession of his nature, otherwise apathetic, and this was the idolatry he cherished for his elder son. The rest of his children he estimated as of an inferior race and type, and would have been content to see hewers of wood and drawers of water for the promotion of the interests of his first-born.

"He will wear a Cardinal's hat yet," he would say to himself, when the nature of his son's vocation was decided upon and fixed, "and no woman shall call him husband and make him bondman! Thank God, at least, for that!"

So, making the best of the inexorable resolution of his boy, he managed to extract consolation from what had caused him chagrin in the beginning.

It may be inferred from what has been here related that the mother of Mordaunt Trevor had led no very happy or satisfactory life, and that her proselytism had been perhaps a matter of expediency for the securing of family peace and tranquillity so essential to her gentle nature.

For there is little doubt that Ernest Mordaunt was, in his quiet way, a despot, though he spoke so feelingly of the serfdom of husbands, meaning, it may be supposed, the bondage the marriage tie entails in the abstract.

But nothing of this sort could now come between father and son, for the gentle mother was gone, who had sacrificed her own yearnings for the welfare of her eldest born, and worn her yoke of forbearance long and meekly. No tyrant like the leaden sway of the obstinacy of inertia, such as late and early signalized Ernest Trevor!

While still the Italian plan of study was in abeyance, for Mordaunt Trevor would take no positive step without the consent of his grandfather and chief benefactor, an event occurred in the household of his father which swayed his destiny.

A letter from India reached Ernest Trevor, from an old and valued friend, who, on the point of death, bequeathed to him his daughter as his ward, entreating him to receive her as an inmate of his house, and if possible to cement her attachment to his family by giving her in marriage to one of his noble sons.

He acknowledged that she was of mixed blood, though born in marriage, and so far ill-disciplined and poorly educated, and he entreated for her all the more (poor as she might otherwise prove, notwithstanding her large fortune) a place in that righteous household which he remembered as the abode of peace and religious law, in the early marriage days of his friend.

The whole property and government of Medora Gwathmey were to be placed at the disposition of her guardian unconditionally. He ended by conjuring Mr. Trevor by the memory of their youthful friendship not to refuse to assume this responsible office, so important to the welfare of his child.

Notwithstanding this appeal, Mr. Trevor would have repelled the very idea of such innovation on his habits

and household peculiarities, had it not been for the animated representations of Ambrose Trevor, who implored him, among other considerations, not to relinquish so favorable an opportunity for the future establishment of his son Mordaunt. Of this motive for receiving Medora Gwathmey as a member of his family, its object was kept, however, in profound ignorance at the time, nor was it, until too late to influence his course of action, revealed to him.

She came; a girl of sixteen, dark, thin, graceful, unformed as a savage in mind and manners; yet not wanting in capacity, nor in engaging qualities.

Beauty in the sight of Mordaunt Trevor she never possessed. Her shapeless nose, broad smile, and flattened forehead were poorly atoned for in his estimation by her magnificent teeth, and glorious, coal-black eyes. Her coarse straight black hair betrayed too plainly her Eastern origin for his fastidious taste, and in its very strength and abundance too much of the animal predominated, he fancied; nor were her sinuous gliding motions agreeable or winning to his eye, as they seemed to be to the observance of all others.

From the first his instincts were against her, nor were they ever wholly changed.

An interval of months elapsed before Mordaunt went to Italy, during which he was thrown daily with Medora Gwathmey, and the consequence was, on her part, as well as he could determine, an almost sisterly affection; on his a more than brotherly indifference. Towards Ambrose, the priest, as she called him, her manifestations were entirely different. A coolness of manner, amounting to aversion, reigned between them, or seemed

to reign, from the first, and continued to evince itself, at least as long as Mordaunt Trevor remained a witness of their intercourse.

A few months after the arrival of Medora Gwathmey he went to Italy, and entered on his double career of student of art and of medicine, for he gave the rein to inclination in those galleries of mighty masters.

A year later he was suddenly recalled by a cold, stern letter from his father, or rather order of recall, ended by a passionate appeal from his brother, conjuring him to return immediately, as the only remedy against fearful consequences.

He returned to find Medora Gwathmey dying, as she had alleged in confidence to her friends and physician, from the effects of the hopeless passion she had suffered to gain possession of her heart and whole being, its object being no other than himself!

Difficult as it was to persuade him of the possibility of such a morbid wilfulness of feeling on her part, and unjust as he felt the demands of his family, and above all, his brother's incredulity as to his unconsciousness of Medora's attachment, he was at length, through her own entreaties and the weakness of his youth and position, drawn into the fatal snare of marriage with this evidently dying girl. "A mere form," as he was assured by priest and physician, "soon to be dispensed with in favor of a more constant bridegroom—the *worm*." These were the very words employed by Ambrose Trevor.

Nevertheless, from the hour of that ill-starred marriage, Medora revived, as if by some miraculous agency, and a month later was able to accompany her husband on his return to Italy.

Six months later the bolt fell! Her infant then saw the light, and by means of letters falling accidentally into his unsuspecting hands, and her own confessions, Mordaunt Trevor became convinced that the author of his wife's dishonor, and his own disgrace, was the monkish brother he had idolized.

Then it was that, discarding home, family, name, fortune, he threw everything aside and fled from the old world to find refuge from his shame and despair in the new.

From that hour he was lost to all ties of blood, or habit, or assumed allegiance. He heard indirectly, and by the merest accident, that his father and wife continued to dwell together; that Ambrose had buried himself in a convent in Italy, and that he himself was supposed to be a madman, exiled from society.

It was at the earnest solicitation of his grandfather at last, addressed to him through the papers of his country, that he revealed his concealment and portions of his history to that beloved, and honored, relative, and benefactor.

This was done in strictest confidence, and from that time they corresponded regularly, an inestimable consolation to both, deeply attached as they were to one another.

Shortly before his death this relative had inherited a large estate, which he transmitted by will to his grandson, Mordaunt Trevor—the remainder of his daughter's children having, by the inscrutable will of God, one by one, passed away, after their brother's abandonment of his family.

It will be remembered that the hope of seeing a near relative before his death had been the cause assigned by Doctor Mordaunt for his sudden departure from Califor-

nia at the time of Mrs. Howard's illness in San Francisco. His grandfather, in his declining strength, had journeyed as far as New York, in the hope of being able to bear the voyage to California, for he was well convinced that under existing circumstances his grandson would not consent to return to England, even on a temporary visit.

His wish was to see him once more, and to hear from his truthful lips the details of his history, so far only outlined by his pen; nor indeed was the hope entirely wanting to this venerable man, that the mild, invigorating climate of that new region might lengthen, to some extent, his slender chain of life, and give him new strength and energy. As we have seen, this was a fallacious hope. Doctor Mordaunt reached New York in obedience to his summons a few days only before his beloved relative breathed his last, finding sad consolation in the memory of those dying moments in later years; but at the time wholly crushed and stricken by his bereavement.

We have seen how he employed a portion of the large fortune of which by the death of his grandfather he became so unexpectedly possessed, for he had not known of this accession of wealth until they met in New York. From that time he had resided at Ilium, engaged in good works and filled with pious purposes. A year before the time of his meeting with Mrs. Howard in the cars he had heard of his wife's death, and a twelvemonth before that, of the decease of his brother Ambrose.

His father still survived, cherishing with tender solicitude the child of shame whom he had adopted to his affections, and persisted in believing legitimate, whether

by the determined obstinacy of his own spirit, setting nature herself at nought in its self-delusion, or through the subtle and sophistic persuasions of his son Ambrose, Mordaunt never knew, nor sought to know. Enough! this fatal league had made England abhorrent to him, and yet, for the sake of the old man himself, whose love he had never enjoyed, and that of the inoffensive and irresponsible offspring of fraud and crime, he, as a man of any magnanimity of feeling, could scarce have wished it otherwise. To all this Hester Howard bent an earnest and often tearful attention; and the manner in which the narration was made, at once constrained and rapid, evidenced how great an effort it cost the narrator—how sincerely it renewed his suffering.

“You see there was no recourse, situated as I was,” he added sternly at the termination of his relation of this tragedy of his life, “none either in law or ethics, or the code of honor. I could not bring my own blood into a tribunal of justice. I could not, would not, shed that blood which warms my own heart; nor could I compromise with shame. Abandonment of the whole ground was all that remained to me. Yet I was spared the greatest pang of all, inasmuch as I never loved the woman who so grossly deceived me, nor feigned to her that I loved her; and perhaps, indeed, was my punishment the just consequence of my own weakness in yielding to the artful persuasions of others, when my own soul was at stake.”

“Had you been differently connected with one of the offending parties, you would not have hesitated, then, to apply for a divorce,” Hester said in a low tone, as if almost afraid of her own question.

"Certainly not; I should have cut off such an incubance of shame, had it not involved my family, as I would a limb threatened with gangrene."

"Then you do not disapprove of divorces, under oppressive circumstances, either for man or woman?" she asked, with a swelling throat and an unwonted hesitancy of speech. Suspecting nothing of her history, he openly responded to her question; yet it was long before his answer came, steady and slow: it was his way to ponder thus before replying.

"A man may be pardoned for infidelity—a woman, never. It is only where the laws of the land pronounce moral death upon a man that I consider a woman entitled to such divorce as would warrant her in marrying again. Mere separation by agreement would accomplish all the rest."

"You would marry a felon's divorced wife, then, in preference to any other so situated?" she said, with an effort at a smile that cost her dear. "Desertion, ill-usage, incongruity of character, would weigh nothing in the scales of your judgment, opposed to a crime against society. This is a man's one-sided opinion, I fear."

"And yet I would not choose exactly to marry even a felon's divorced wife, for all that," he said, shaking his head and smiling. "nor any divorced woman, if I know myself."

"You are right," she murmured, sinking back in her chair; "such a woman is blighted and marred at the best—set apart from her fellows, like a tree struck by lightning, marked for solitude and despair."

"But why continue this profitless discussion?" he asked, taking her hand and pressing his privileged lips

upon its polished and moulded surface; "we love each other; *we* are free from the painful ties that bound us; we are young, as the word goes, for are we not still ascending the hill of life? and shall we not do this, hand-in-hand, my Hester?"

She shook her head sadly. "There are lions in our path, Mordaunt," she said.

"You poetic people are so apt to let your imagination outstrip realities," he rejoined, with a grave smile, "that I cannot apprehend any impediment so great as you conceive it to be in the road of our happiness; mine, perhaps, I should properly say."

"Oh, Mordaunt," she exclaimed, passionately, "I cannot admit that your happiness is half as much at stake as mine in this matter of affection. Your life is filled with good works, and the prosecution of a mighty purpose. You are self-poised, self-contained, gifted as none but God's chosen instruments are ever gifted, free and unshackled, as men alone can be, and organized to command the affection of all you meet, even by the waving of a hand; but I—" she shrank back as if she saw a spectre advancing towards her, "am utterly desolate, save in your affection, and limited to a sphere so narrow that I am taught thereby each day to be humble and patient; surrounded, too, by circumstances that are closing around me as once the walls of the inquisition cell closed around their victims, and which may ultimately crush me!

"Oh, friend, deem not this the repining of an ambitious spirit shorn of its strength. God knows, a lonely cabin on the mountain top, or in some deep, sequestered valley, were to me an abode of perfect and blissful contentment, if shared by you, and illumined with your

spirit. But I tremble for my future. Dark clouds are pending. God, and He only, can tell how all this may end."

She sat with clasped hands, with bowed head and moving lips, when she had concluded this fond avowal, and prophecy of woe, so closely blended.

"Listen to me," he said. "I will prove to you, *if I can*, at least the equality of my affection with your own. By some great and inscrutable law of nature, I am not permitted to hold or exercise the power I wield, save at the sacrifice of all peculiar or individual concentration of feeling or employment.

"Already my wand is trembling in my hands. Soon it may escape me altogether, if my love for you grows steadily day by day as it has done of late. But I shall not regret this. I have exercised it long enough for the benefit of others to allow myself, in common justice, some participation in the sweet privileges of humanity. Enough will remain to soothe and comfort you in all your nervous suffering, and I shall be better, stronger, happier, emancipated from this strange necessity. Yet so far I have scrupulously avoided all interference with my gift. I put away from me the art I loved, society for which I was fitted, every engrossing occupation, so as to remain the instrument of good, for which my Maker intended me.

"Once only, once only was this power perverted, and then not from any intention of my own, for already I had seen you, Hester! A young and beautiful woman placed herself in my hands, was benefited, cured; but not without injury to her peace of mind. I tell you this, my love, from no mistaken vanity; no man ever suffered

more deeply from such a cause, nor atoned for it with more self-humiliation, for to her, as the only antidote at hand for the poison she had imbibed, I confided through her sister (whom you will know some day, my friend then and now) the history of my life.

"The medicine, thus administered, worked her cure. She saw that beneath the cypress shadows of my sorrow no rose could bloom. My wife was living then, and through her I was sealed apart in desolation. She understood at once, this rare and noble girl, the remediless nature of my condition, and struggled with her passion until she obtained the victory she desired and deserved."

"Is she still living, Mordaunt?" asked Hester, deeply moved; "if so, bring her to me: I feel that I could love this woman."

"No; she is happier now, who was happy before. She had been blessed as a wife and mother some years before she died, and her boy is my namesake. You shall see him some day, Hester, for his father sends him to visit me occasionally for the sake of her who is gone; see him in our home. And now hear me. I claim no superhuman fortitude in having resisted what might have been my temptation, had I not seen and loved you first. Yes, my love, you were embalmed in my heart to the exclusion of all other occupants, though but a memory and a dream. But you are my reality now, Hester." He inclined forward and kissed her brow, lightly, tenderly as a brother might.

"Mordaunt, you *must* not," she said, putting him away. "I am not strong enough to speak now; the time will soon come." She paused, she gasped; one hand was on

her heart; her parted lips were pale. "God strengthen us," she murmured.

"Forgive me," he plead, bowing his head deferentially before her, "I will be patient. But oh! Hester, I too have suffered extremely. Let my ordeal be short. 'Hope deferred,' you know, 'maketh the heart sick.' Of all men living, I stand most in need of such consolation as you alone can give me." He rose, he stood before her preparing to depart.

She ought to have spoken then. It was her tide of time, but she suffered it to ebb from her in her weak irresolution. Much sorrow, much suffering to both might have been spared by a few prompt, decisive words, but these faltered upon her lips. She promised herself a few more days of happiness before she would drop the veil of sorrow and shame between them, for had he not spoken lightly of divorced women, and as such, would he care to claim the affection he sought so eagerly now?

So much happiness was at stake that she shrank from the moment of trial with a sick and nerveless spirit, for the very light of heaven (she felt so then) would be little worth to her were his affection, his presence, forever withdrawn from the sphere of her existence. Thus she believed in the credulity of her absorbing passion!

Could she have looked forward then to the years before her, and beheld herself calm, collected, self-contained, moving onward through their sunless labyrinth towards the completion of her still hidden destiny, she would have fallen, and died perhaps, at the contemplation of her own disappointed hopes. Fallen on the very pedestal of her grief!

Is it not wonderful, this complete concurrence of

power with necessity, of endurance with emergency—this adaptation to circumstances of the human soul, war as it may, when the long vista of fate is first opened before it?

It is a beautiful order, too, that those high-strung natures come easiest into harness, chafe under it less desperately than beings of coarser mould.

The blooded horse will start from his shadow, yet walk up boldly to the cannon's mouth. The bravest natures are often those that shrink from the lesser troubles of life and still have within them the force to resist the sternest evils that fate can present. **HERS WAS OF THESE.**

BOOK SIXTH.

Say it, Harold : do not look
The curse ; deliver all you came to say.
THE BLOT ON THE 'SCUTCHEON.

A month since I besought you to employ
Restraints, which had prevented many a pang,
But now the harsher course must be pursued.
ROBERT BROWNING.

The mortal whose brave foot
Has trod, unscathed, the temple courts so far,
That he descries at length the shrine of shrines,
Must let no sneering of the demons' eyes,
Whose wrath he met unquailing, follow sly,
And fasten on him, fairly past their power :
He must not stagger, faint and fall at last.
ROBERT BROWNING

The long self-exiled Lara is restored !—BYRON.

BOOK SIXTH.

CHAPTER I.

CONVALESCENCE AND CONSECRATION—VIVACIOUS VISIONS—A GAME OF CROSS PURPOSES.

DURING her invalid condition Mrs. Howard had invited the Misses Dean to remain at Briarheath and do its honors to her guest, Doctor Trevor, in the absence of her sisters.

Doctor Patterson and Brother Sutton had called together to congratulate their refractory patient and client on her recovery, and been blandly received, but neither inquired for the offending minister of her return to convalescence, and the worthy family physician took occasion to denounce, in sweeping terms, all measures in medicine not strictly orthodox, and to praise the consistency of those noble martyrs to science, who preferred to perish by system, rather than drag on, as he powerfully expressed it, "a maimed and miserable existence through the galvanism of the charlatan."

Hester smiled away down in the depths of her heart at the transparent spite of the prejudiced old man, and contrasted him forcibly with the liberal California physician, who, when his own devices had failed for entrapping the coy bird sleep, had called so openly upon another to effect this needful end.

"Dey all says here," said old Lora one day to her mistress, "dat Mulgrave, dat 'torney man, 's gwine to be my master, but I tells 'em, why he's nowhere compared to Doctor Mordaunt!"

"But Mulgrave is out of the question, Lora, and so, indeed, is Doctor Trevor," she added, with a sigh. "I am bound hand and foot, Lora, and there is no escape for me, as you well know, but in death. Mr. Howard lives and I am his wife, and this is the grim reality," she murmured. "Would, oh! would to God it were a dream, like all the rest!"

"How is you boun' han' an' foot, honey? Wen a man goes of wid anoder woman, all de world ober, dat fus woman is free. Dis is de law ob black an' white, ob hebben an' yearth, ob king an' slave; an' Mulgrave he knows dat, for he says to me one day, 'Lora,' says he, 'how would you like me for a nex' master?' He did in fac', chile, but I jus' turned off so, and laughed, for I knowed dat would nebber be, wile turkey buzzards, and peahens kep' separate roosts. Now Mulgrave knows well enuff dat Mass' Julius Howard is livin' 'cross de ocean, for de fus time he come here, he axed me all about it, and I let him go on questionin' till I seed he had it all pat, and den I lef' him jus' where I found him, none de wiser for ole Lora!"

"You were the better lawyer of the two on that occasion, Lora; you are truly diplomatic."

"So I has always been told!" she said, with simplicity; "but now do take dis matter in 'sideration, Miss Hester. Dat man lubs you like his life, he always did, chile! I seed dat 'way off in Californy. Now jus' make up your min' to snap dat rope at oncet, and let Julius

Howard go long. He's a mean creatur, chile! He'll come back yet upon you when all's done, ef you don't lef' him down easy and give him his 'mancipation papers now—walking papers, some folks calls 'em. He nebber had de right sort ob lub in his bres' for any woman. Rotten lub is wusser dan no lub at all, and dat is de only kind he knows ob. I'se done warned you now, Miss Hester, my own dear angel mistus. It would gib me joy to hold one more sweet baby ob yourn in dese ole arms befoe dey drop in de dust; an' I knows Doctor Mordaunt lubs you like his life."

"Oh, Lora, Lora! don't say such things to me! strengthen me rather to keep in the path I tread, thorny although it prove. I try to think how my Saviour suffered and triumphed, I try to realize his anguish, and to bow down before his cross; but my heart is stubborn and worldly, it will not bow. Would that I had your simple childlike faith, old nurse, I should be far happier, stronger."

"You see, Miss Hester, you is like my ole man Sampson in one way (my fus ole man wat died ob de cholera), he nebber could fin' his way about at night, like mos' colored pussons, cause he always looked at de stars instead ob on de earth benefe his feet. So you, Miss Hester, looks de wrong way fur your 'ligion, readin', an' writin', an' talkin' to great preachers an' all dat, wen it's all right near you, ef you would bend your eyes down lowly, chile," suiting the action to the word. "'Watch an' pray,' dat's all any one kin do in dis world ob trouble, an' look at your own steps, not your neighbor's lights; dat's my principle, chile, and hebben is to be foun' lyin' at de foot ob de cross, 'way down at de foot ob Jesus Christ."

The manner of the old woman was so earnest, and her life had been so much in keeping with her precept, that her rude words bore a certain conviction to the heart of Hester Howard, denied to those of more exalted guides : Elias Crawford, and the like.

That night she slept and dreamed that she was tossed on the waves of a stormy sea, lying on a frail raft at the mercy of the crested billows that lapped her feet. As is usual in dreams, the circumstances of her condition did not seem so extraordinary to her, as they must have done in reality, and the sight of the waters around her inspired her with interest and elation rather than with terror.

Across the wide weltering waste she descried a boat, in the prow of which a female figure was standing bearing on high a banner illuminated with a gigantic golden cross formed of stars. On nearer approach this proved to be the familiar form of Mrs. Carisbrook.

The rowers were men with muffled faces, three in number, silent as the dead. As the boat approached her she heard the voice of Mrs. Carisbrook saying, in its clear, round, remarkable tones,

"We have come to rescue you, Hester: now choose which hand shall help you from the raft."

Then the three muffled faces dropped their veils, and she saw the several aspects of her husband, of Mr. Mulgrave, and of Doctor Mordaunt.

With a blind delight, indescribable as transient, she reached forth her hands confidently to the man she loved, and as he rose to assist her, a white sea-bird, such as she remembered once to have seen on her voyage to California, came between them and flapped its wet wings in her face.

She awoke with a gasp and sense of suffering that seemed out of place and unreasonable from such a cause. The deep and regular breathing of Lora alone disturbed the silence; the lamp burned low, and flickering shadows crossed the wall and ceiling. The hour, the scene, and her own frame of mind were all in singular unison. She felt that she was still the centre of a sad and troubled dream, from which she could not rise and turn away, and although perfectly awake, maintained the trance-like position of her slumber, rigid with excitement.

Lying thus and there she distinctly saw a white figure start from the shadow, steal across the floor, and pass noiselessly from the room. The handle of the door was turned inaudibly, and this last left ajar, so that when she sprang to her feet, nerved by the impulse of the moment to dare everything rather than doubt longer, she found herself without impediment in the great dark hall, groping in the intense blackness of midnight.

The shutting of a door at a distance alone convinced her that this was no phantom of her imagination. She drew back shuddering into her chamber. That she had not nerve nor strength enough to follow up this adventure she regretted later. As it was the matter was enveloped in mystery for a season.

On awaking the next morning, clear-headed, and refreshed from a tranquil and profound natural slumber, Mrs. Howard saw Mattie and Melissa standing at the foot of her bed, patiently waiting to see her eyes unclosed that they might embrace her.

The surprise, if such it might have been called, of their return, for they were really expected daily, was pleasant and even beneficial to their sister, who, forget-

ting herself, entered with immediate and unwonted interest and gayety into all their descriptions of travel and people they had seen and known, drawing them on by vivacious questions to relate their adventures and impressions.

"Mattie, shall I tell your somnambulic adventure at the 'Cataract House?'" asked Melissa, somewhat maliciously.

"As you please," was the careless answer; but the face of the girl turned pale with vexation, or emotion of some painful kind, and Mrs. Howard, in pity for her evident discomfiture, checked the recital.

"Mattie will tell me herself," said Mrs. Howard, "when she is ready, Melissa. She tells me everything, I believe. But how was it you did not come to see me last night? You must have got back before bed-time, even on the last train, my dear girls?"

"Oh, your lay physician *pro tem.* would not permit us to disturb you, that was all," replied Mattie. "I declare I never was more surprised in my life than to see Doctor Trevor established here as dragon, quite at home in the library, reading 'Hyperion,' when I entered. I was perfectly breathless. I was quite as much prepared to see Professor Jau Jeune, or Mr. Sinclair, or Lorenzo Dow himself, at Briarheath, as that piece of medical perfection. But you know he is as impassible as an Indian, so when I went softly behind him and tapped him on the shoulder, and screamed, 'You here! great Esculapius!' right in his ear as loud as I could bawl, he did not even jump."

"Oh, Mattie, how could you treat Doctor Trevor so irreverently?"

"Irreverently? Why, he has not a gray hair in his head, and I believe his teeth are his own. My ideas of reverence are always connected with a wig and wrinkles and false teeth. What makes you suppose that Doctor Trevor is entitled to be considered venerable?"

"Nay, that is not what I meant at all, and you know it, mischievous girl; but really, I do wish my little sister discriminated better sometimes."

A look was shot from under Mattie's eyebrows in the direction of her unconscious sister, sharp, sinister, lurid, wily as a serpent's when he raises his head to sting, but in the next moment no trace of this glance remained, and the girl was chatting merrily again with a countenance wreathed and radiant with smiles, as she gazed in her sister's face.

Just then Lora made a strange discovery; a large, moist sponge had been dropped between the wall and the bed, that in nowise belonged to the toilet appurtenances of her mistress.

She raised it, and looked at it dubiously; but Melissa at once recognized it as a piece of her own property, with which she was in the habit of making her daily ablutions.

"How strange it should be here!" she said; "I laid it out of my trunk, dry of course, last night, so as to have it at hand in the morning the first thing, and missed it at my bath when I needed it. Could Myra Clay—"

"No, nothing of the kind," interrupted Mrs. Howard. "I will not have that right-minded child either accused or suspected of tampering with the effects of others; although, indeed, I was singularly impressed last night, myself, almost superstitiously; but I will not speak of that now," she said, checking herself, as she thought of

the injury such spectral stories often inflicted on the peace of mind of a whole household.

"This mystery will be better unravelled, I believe, by leaving it alone for the present. And now, dear girls, if you will go down and entertain Doctor Mordaunt—Trevor, I mean—for an hour or two, I will get up, put on a Christian dress instead of a loose wrapper with a cord at the waist, in which I look like a Bedouin, and make an effort to join you in the library before dinner time."

There are days which Orientals love to mark with a white stone. This to Hester Howard was one of these. She was beautiful, too, to-day, with an unusual beauty. Her recent illness had left her face colorless and clear as wax, and the chisel seemed to have been freely passed over its clear-cut features. Her eyes swam in a soft languor; her mouth was curved with a sweet and loving smile, reflected from the tender heart within. Her dress of rich gray silk relieved with black lace became her well; and on her breast and arms, and clasped around her exquisite throat, she wore fine cameos set in pearls of the first water—her choicest jewels.

It pleased her well to see him she loved for the first time bear his part in society with such grace, such dignity, such equipoise. She had never imagined a manner half so winning and so perfect. The very atmosphere was propitious to her enjoyment.

It was a mild autumn day, without a sun. A mellow haze rested over the landscape, bringing out into strong relief the changing aspect of nature as with a background of artistic adaptation. The grass was strewn beneath the deciduous trees with a carpet of rich mosaic made of leaves, golden-crimson, chocolate-brown, or

mingled green and purple. The conqueror's road had been strewn for his approach after the fashion of subjugated nations; but so far he lingered on his path of power and destruction, and nature waited breathlessly.

Many trees were yet in full leaf, however; the oak, the linden, the poplar; and green was still the predominating color; and the rich girdles of dahlias, chrysanthemums, roses and honeysuckles, which yet beautified the parterres, seemed each a wreath flung on the grass.

The great window of the library was thrown up, though a fire burned in the grate, and the soft air found its way through the drooping lace-curtains to the inmates of the apartment.

It curled the papers lying on the centre-table of black marble, so that the bronze hand that maintained them in their place seemed really to repress their airy flight, sternly and with a will, as such a mailed and powerful member might be supposed to do, if it made effort at all.

Beside this table sat Doctor Mordaunt, leaning on his hand; his elbow supported on the marble slab, his fine head turned slightly off, his lips parted, his eyes fixed upon the beautiful woman in the deep morocco chair (which he had last seen encumbered with the portly person of Doctor Patterson), and who was now holding gay and gracious conversation with her friend, Professor Steinbach. He was drawing a contrast, perhaps.

Miss Dean and Melissa Lynne sat together chatting, while engaged with their crochet work. Mattie, half-concealed in the embrasure of the window, was apparently dreaming over a new magazine, but in reality making her own observations on what was passing before her, and drawing her own conclusions therefrom.

She looked very pretty on that memorable day, it may be remarked, "en passant," dressed in her favorite rose-color, as did Melissa in lilac; but such beauty as they possessed was commonplace in its type, compared to their sister's serene and aristocratic loveliness; and this Mattie had sense enough to perceive, as the grisettes of the world rarely have.

As to Melissa, her vanity was constitutional, and therefore not subject to rhyme or reason. Had Helen of Troy appeared before her she would still have found some secret cause of self-felicitation in her own advantages over that peerless dame. Her self-complacency protected her from most of "the slings" and "arrows of outrageous fortune," and like a toper, she found consolation in her glass when all else was wanting.

Every man that looked the least admiringly upon her was in love with her more or less desperately. She had discouraged and refused numbers, according to her version of matters, who never thought of addressing her, and was now, for the first time, in actual possession of the power to do this in the case of Mr. Josiah Evans, to whom allusion has been made before, and who trembled in the balance. For that Mulgrave "shadow" pursued her, much to the detriment of the substance; and on this subject Brother Sutton had spoken wisely to his wife Sophia, as had wife Sophia, in turn, written to Melissa, feelingly.

Mattie, however, as we have seen, *could* discriminate, in spite of her sister Hester's insinuations to the contrary. Her vanity was not an Aaron's rod, and the other serpents of her heart had a full chance to creep, squirm and sting just as much as they had a mind to.

From her post of observation she saw, beyond a doubt, what she had more than suspected the night before, that Doctor Trevor loved her sister Hester; and oh! scandal inconceivable in the case of this immaculate married dame, she perceived certain symptoms that convinced her that the object of this affection was quite conscious thereof and perhaps responsive thereto. "As who would *not* be?" thought Mattie, in a sudden relenting of her nature. "For where will one find such another man? But all is not lost yet. She is bound; *bound*, thank God for that, with fetters of steel," and she ground her small white teeth, "and he is not the man to prosecute a dishonorable love (as the word goes), that is, if I know him; nor she the woman to dare to rive those fetters. If they were mine I would rend them thus," and she snapped the cat's cradle she was idly weaving on her hands, out of a silken guard-chain, then flung it from the open window on the sward beneath. "But those lukewarm natures can never grapple with fate, and are at desperate odds with circumstance: Hester Howard, Parthenia Forbes, and the like!" and her thin lips curled in a bitter sarcastic smile.

A few minutes later, while still absorbed in the earnestness of her own reflections, she was aware of a presence near at hand that always impressed her deeply, and with some perturbation of heart, perceived that Doctor Trevor had come to take refuge in the same embrasure that afforded her a safe look-out of concealment.

It was a bay-window, across the straight opening of which a lace curtain had been hung, so as to screen it partially from the room to which it appertained. Within its recess was a tête-à-tête sofa, and a hanging-basket

swung from the centre, of flowers, daily renewed. Beyond was seen the fair flowery lawn, and the stately park of Briarheath bounded the horizon.

"You have a pleasant seat here," he said, "may I share it?" and he entered unbidden.

"Oh, certainly, who has a better right? You are 'l'ami de la famille,' you know, as well as an old acquaintance!"

"Not very old!" he smiled, taking his seat beside her as he spoke, scarcely knowing to what she had allusion.

"True, true, I forget; it was only last June that I saw you for the first time. I mean old, comparatively."

"How *comparatively*, may I ask, fair maiden?"

"I mean—I mean in comparison with your acquaintance with sister Hester for instance, and the rest."

Her rare self-possession forsook her for the moment. She faltered, flushed; no need of rouge to-day.

He surveyed her calmly, sadly. "You did not know then," he began, then a moment later, as if from some second thought, broke off before a suggestion could be derived from his remark.

"What?" she asked, intensely, earnestly fixing her burning eyes upon his face, "*what* did I not know? what have you to reveal to me?"

"You are tragical to-day, Miss Mattie; you have on your Pythoness expression; you alarm me. Let me feel your pulse," and he laid his finger upon her wrist. "It flies like a broken watch-spring. I must prescribe for you. In the first place, how do you sleep? that is my specialty, you know."

"Oh, soundly, profoundly; but all this does not answer my question."

"First answer mine." He had withdrawn his hand from her wrist now, and passed it slightly, almost imperceptibly to herself, above her head.

"Well, what do you wish to ask?" she said, peevishly. "There is no bore like a determined catechist."

He took no notice of the tone of her remark. It did not disconcert him at all, under the circumstances. The investigation he wished to make reached behind mere curiosity.

"I would know the subject of your dreams last night," he said, gravely.

She started, blanched visibly. "This is a very odd proceeding on your part," she rejoined. "I prefer not to tell you what I dreamed last night, Doctor Trevor; nay, I will not."

"But I must know," he persisted.

"*Par quel nécessité?*" she asked, smiling up in his face, "do not fancy for a moment that you had any share therein."

"I hazard no conjecture," he pursued. "I ask for information, on the contrary, and that for the good of many."

"How mysterious! I declare you are equal to the Delphic Oracle yourself (calling me a Pythoness, forsooth!) or to reach further back, the Sphynx. You put on the airs of a Druid, or of a Master, summoning familiar spirits to do his will!"

"Well, be my Ariel, then, for the nonce, and submit with a good grace," he said, persuasively, fixing his calm eyes upon her with a sad majesty, as he spoke, that banished every coquettish idea. "What did you dream last night, Mattie?" he repeated, earnestly.

"You compel me to tell you against my will," she remonstrated; "this is not fair. By your art you compel me! I told you I was clairvoyante. Let me pass. I will hold fast my soul secrets."

She rose slightly from the sofa, then sat down again softly, as one oppressed by opium or fatigue.

"You are holding me," she said, "I cannot go. What is it you would hear?"

"Your dream."

"It was so horrible," she exclaimed, shuddering, "it was not like me at all. Something I never thought of when awake; something wicked and diabolical even. You will hate me if I tell you."

"What! for an involuntary thought? How unjust you must think me! Proceed, Mattie, time passes," and again his fingers fluttered above her head.

"I dreamed," she said, speaking without further resistance, "that I went to sister Hester's room with a sponge in my hand dipped in chloroform, which I held above her face until she died, and that I took her jewels away with me afterwards and a bag of gold. I remember nothing more."

"What motive impelled you in your dream, Mattie?" he questioned, whispering grimly.

"Revenge and jealousy," she answered, in faint, smothered accents, "for pity's sake spare me all further recital: as a gentleman, as a man of honor, I charge you to forbear."

"I obey you," he said, rising and bowing deferentially, and again passing his hand above her head, he murmured, "From me, Mattie Lynne, you are free from this hour forevermore."

"What is all this mystery about?" asked Melissa, lifting the curtain and standing crochet work in hand at the opening; "my curiosity is all alive."

"It is a question of dreams," replied Doctor Trevor, "would you share it? If so, come in and relate your last night's vision. Be faithful, now."

"Sister Hester had a very queer one," said Melissa, evading the question. "I suppose she told you. She dreamed that a wet sea-bird flapped its wings in her face and almost stunned her with the violence of the blow, and this morning, lo! and behold, my missing sponge, still moist, though I took it dry from my trunk at bed-time, was found on the floor by her bedside. We begin to think that Mattie has been walking in her sleep again."

"You are right," he said; "she passed my room-door in her somnambule slumber, on her way back to her own. I watched her, lamp in hand, until I saw her enter her own chamber, and heard the door shut behind her, and even then waited anxiously till morning to hear of her entire safety. Never allude again, however, to your knowledge of this peculiarity in her presence, if you value your young sister's peace, Miss Lynne; and above all, let every other inmate of this house, henceforth, sleep with locked doors."

"Remember this charge, I pray you. I cannot say more just now. She hears us."

"Well, has she not heard us all the time?" asked Melissa, in amazement.

"No, no; nor is she conscious of much else that has passed; be discreet!"

Smiling, and pressing his finger to his lips, he passed

from the embrasure, leaving the two sisters together—one drowsy and immovable.

"Wake up, Mattie; it is near dinner-time!" said Melissa, shaking the drowsy girl, who rose languidly at her touch, from the sofa.

"Is it possible I have slept?" asked Mattie, looking around her, eagerly. "It seems to me Doctor Trevor and I were talking a moment since. What could have overcome me so? Oh, I know now. The smell of that datura under the window. I do wish sister Hester would have it taken back to the greenhouse. Nasty, poisonous, Jamestown weed that it is, with a fine sounding name!"

"Datura, or not," said Melissa, merrily, "you look strangely bewildered, so come away with me directly. Come up-stairs, Mattie; I have something so charming to tell you. Some news Miss Dean has just brought back with her. Did you know she had arrived? and I'm sure you will be astonished as I was, for it's not *his* time at all. It hasn't been a month since he was here, and I'm sure I had not the least expectation from his manner when here last; but men are so peculiar" (ordinary women have this way of talking of one-half of the human race, as if *peculiarity could* attach to masses), "and you never know how to take them. Just to think of his coming back."

"Of whom can you be speaking?" said Mattie, with a bewildered air.

"Of Mulgrave!" whispered Melissa.

"Oh, is that all?" said her sister, disdainfully.

"All indeed! I assure you, Mattie," with an injured expression, "it is very much to me—more than you suppose."

"Nothing at all, Melissa, believe me," persisted the indomitable girl.

"You are very well informed on this subject, Miss Mattie Lynne, it seems. Pray, where did you derive your knowledge?"

Mattie tapped her head-piece, as poor Parthenia Forbes had done her breast, and with the same signification.

"Oh, is that all?" sneered Melissa, meaning to be witty in the repetition of her sister's words.

"All, Melissa? Ah! if you knew everything! Poor, blinded girl! I tell you, sister, there is a cold, marble statue interposing its arms between us and happiness, like that dreadful thing in Tom Moore's poem, 'Rupert,' that used to make my blood creep so of nights when I was a little child, and like that it wears a ring, a fatal magnetic ring, blasting to all other happiness, as well as to its own, perhaps."

"I don't understand you at all, Mattie. I believe you are raving, or talking in your sleep. Are you ill? You are not awake surely? What *do* you mean, Mattie Lynne?"

"Look there!" and the girl, for all explanation, pointed to a window at the opposite extremity of the apartment, beside which Mrs. Howard and Doctor Trevor were standing, engaged in earnest conversation.

Mr. Steinbach had gone out for a stroll and a smoke. The Misses Dean had retired to make their toilet for dinner, one of them having just arrived from a distance with frisettes slightly discomposed; and the sisters were alone at one end of the apartment, as were the two friends at the other.

"Well, I see nothing so dreadful; only Doctor Trevor

and sister Hester. He is courting her they do say, and it may be true, though I can see no proof of it. They are very calm and cool to one another, as far as I can perceive. What phantom are you conjuring up between us and them? You must be in a magnetic dream. The room is empty otherwise. I can see nothing."

"Melissa, you are a fool," said Mattie, impatiently, cutting the gordian knot at once, "and literal to absurdity. Again I say, look there! Between those two conspirators my peace of mind is gone, and yours will go too, Melissa, if you rely for your guidance on your own estimates of things. Mulgrave is a lover of Hester Howard, not of yours, nor will he ever be."

"You are envious, Mattie Lynne; that is the amount of the whole matter," said Melissa, turning away contemptuously, yet with a quivering lip and rising tears she could hardly repress. For a sudden conviction had flashed across her that Mattie and brother Sutton might both be right, only "men are so peculiar," that she had not until now attached the least consequence to her brother-in-law's conclusions.

Mattie's words of warning smote harshly to her soul, such as it was, and she went straight up-stairs and stared at herself resolutely in the glass, not out of, but into countenance, for half an hour, and wondered how any man could resist such potent charms, and ended by believing it impossible!

Mattie, in the meanwhile, paced the long veranda, wrapped in melancholy musings, and a scarlet shawl.

"She has not told him yet, I am positive, of the existence of her husband. He has not declared himself, I suppose; will not, until he comes again (it is character-

istic of him to hold back on such occasions, as I well know), and she thinks it useless to interrupt the process of his courtship with such information. Time enough when the proposal comes. She will enjoy herself until then, or perhaps," and she started at the thought, "she *may* gain courage to sue for a divorce in the interval, and from what I heard Mulgrave say, she certainly could obtain one readily. I am sure I would, in her situation, without hesitation; but she is so Quixotic, if such a word may be applied at all to a 'very woman.' How I loved her once, and how I hate her now!" and she clenched her hand and ground her small white teeth.

"Yet what has she done to injure me? I never named this man's name to her except carelessly, as far as I remember. It was a plan I had that proved fatal to its deviser. Had I confided in her, had I told her what he was to me, she never would have superseded me, never! She is too generous, too high-souled for that. But he! knowing, as he must have known, how I loved him—I give him credit for common observation only in asserting this—how could he so sacrifice my happiness? Stealing to Briarheath, like a thief in the night, while I was away, and he knew this well (for Parthenia Forbes told him, as she wrote me while I was at Niagara), and after knowing that, he comes in my absence!

"That convenient illness! Gotten up for the occasion, perhaps, just to have an excuse to send for him, for I shall ever believe he received some intimation to come, or why should he have chanced at Lynnesborough just when old Doctor Woodenhead declared her at extremity! The old humbug has told me to prepare for immediate death on three several occasions, and I always took heart

of grace from every warning, and got well with accelerated velocity. But mummary apart, I shall anticipate Madam Hester Howard's communication. Before we reach Ilium, Doctor Trevor shall be put in possession of the truth, and I shall leave him to digest it as he can. Ay, chew the 'cud of his sweet and bitter fancies,' 'à discretion,' as the French say, when they give a pound of stale bread to an ounce of staler meat. The fool's cap again! How mournfully its bells jingle to-day! What sadness in Grimaldi's aspect!

"An actress, too! I wonder how he will like that discovery. 'Mrs. Myrtis Lynne,' accidentally discovered. It is inscribed on the tablets of my brain. He has heard of her, no doubt. We never did, because we live out of the orbit of civilization, hermetically sealed in the juices of our own dulness here in Lynnesborough; but everybody else has, of course. There is another person of the name of Lynne who might have trodden the stage with better effect, perhaps, and may still, if desperation seizes her! Alas! alas!

"But dinner is ready. The fossils are descending the stairs, hand-in-hand. I wonder if such old dried-up things really can love each other as they make out! It's 'Penelope, dear,' and 'Sophro, love,' until one grows sick!

"The trunk of the Misses Dean was alone saved from the wreck on Mount Ararat—so said the papers of the day. How carefully they have preserved its contents! With what unconscious grace they wear them!

"Good people, though, in their way. Here comes Melissa, radiant in starch and self-complacency, in spite of what I told her. I will run and wash my face, and put a little rouge on my back-ground of clay-colored

powder, and eclipse them all. See if I don't." And Mattie was as good as her word. How she sparkled on that occasion! Champagne was flat in comparison. Miss Penelope Dean forgot her false teeth, in rather a shaky condition at that period, and laughed outright. Mr. Steinbach forsook his plate to listen to her prattle, and James Sellers officiously took occasion to bear it away in the interval of suspended attention. Doctor Mor-daunt laughed heartily, as did sister Hester in spite of her languid happiness; and Melissa condescended to simper.

At dessert Mr. and Mrs. Sutton came in with their train of children, having at last received an invitation to Briarheath from its mistress, unconscious that they were waiting for one. Of course the family occasion was complete, and great joy prevailed at the board. There were many open faces, and many shut hearts; and it seemed hard indeed that, much as she had striven to please and benefit them, the three sisters of the hostess (like Cinderella's) were all her secret enemies. I forget, however, that there was sincerity at least in the dislike of her relatives to the little glass slipper, and that they were appeased at length by her prosperity. So the case presents itself somewhat differently, on consideration. Yet we will not efface the record.

CHAPTER II.

A JOURNEY—A REVELATION.

EARLY the next morning Doctor Trevor and Mattie Lynne took their departure from Briarheath to catch the northward-bound train from Lynnesborough to Ilium. This journey could not be accomplished without a change of cars, and was of a night and day in duration.

At the great junction, which they reached early in the afternoon, the train they were on failed to make connection, and they were detained several hours, waiting for the cars in the deserted depot parlor of the station-house.

It was here that Mattie essayed to broach the subject of her sister's condition, for some time ineffectually. Doctor Trevor drew a new poem from his pocket, with which he proposed to beguile the time which Mattie thought might have been much better employed. The little volume contained Robert Browning's "Paracelsus," from which he began in a voice of low monotonous melody, like the rippling of a stream, to read fugitive passages.

"This wearies you, Mattie," he said at last, "beautiful and noble as it is, for a young girl's heart responds not to what finds vibrant echo in the spirit of the worn, experienced man of middle age. You would better like the little life-drama called 'Pippa passes.' Let me read you this scene."

"No, no. Go on just where you are. I can under-

stand anything that a sane man ever wrote," and she came and peeped over his shoulder.

"Hear this, then ; is it not exquisite ?" he proceeded :

"Are there not, Festus, are there not, dear Michael,
Two points in the adventure of a diver—

One when, a beggar, he prepares to plunge ;

One when, a prince, he rises with his pearl ?

Festus, I plunge."

"I wait you when you rise," exclaimed Mattie, passionately, in pursuance of the text. "There, you shall read no further. I have a right to expect the pearl from you !"

It was not the interpolation so much as the thrilling tones of her voice, the burning gaze of her dark eyes flashing like guns in a port-hole, the grasp of her small tense hands upon his arm as she shook it slightly, that proclaimed the full meaning of her improvised addition to the poet's words. He rose and turned away.

"You are too excitable, my poor young girl, by half. I confess I know not how to deal with you."

"Deal with me as you would with sister Hester under the same circumstances," she said bitterly, yet with a stifled sob in her voice.

"I cannot imagine," he coldly rejoined, "your sister Hester placed in similar circumstances."

"Your rebuke is stern, yet I deserve it," she replied, dashing away a tear as she spoke, and smiling scornfully in his face.

"Let us forget the past, Mattie. I never meant to injure you ; it was all a great mistake. I always loved your sister, and I earnestly wish to be a true brother to hers."

But Mattie burst forth furiously : "I have been im-

posed upon, and by the two beings I loved best on earth. Sisterhood and brotherhood may go their ways for me!" stamping her foot. "I will none of them! To think how you drew me out in Ilium, calling upon me for the purpose (I see it all now), and setting every tongue in motion, because of the very unusual nature of the proceeding on your part, merely to talk of *her* whom you had known years before, yet appeared at that time to consider a stranger—what duplicity!"

"I did not know then, Mattie, nor until you told me so, that her husband was dead," he rejoined, mildly, re-seating himself beside her. "I had met her on the cars, and relieved her pain unconscious of this fact, and unrecognized by her, not many weeks before I made your pleasant acquaintance. Had Mr. Howard lived, we should have continued strangers; for with the tender feelings I entertained for her long before, by a force superior to my will, I could never honorably have sought her friendship, nor would this affection have ripened into a more passionate regard, had I not been assured of her widowhood. It was my good fortune to be again a minister of good to Hester Howard. Her life, through God's grace, was rescued by this sixth sense of mine—call it what you will—this gift of magnetism, and she has lately learned to love me. (Be patient, Mattie; do not speak yet a while.) This much, at least, I hope and believe. But whether she will be my wife is another matter: she has not promised this. I can only trust and pray that this great felicity may yet be reserved for me, and in this hope, give us your God-speed, Mattie!"

"You say it was from me you heard *first* that my

sister was a widow," said Mattie, suddenly straightening up, and again dashing the tears from her large, bright eyes. "I am responsible then for all the miserable mistakes, it seems, that have been the consequence of mine. I should be almost criminal to leave you any longer in error; yet it is with extreme reluctance I become the bearer of news destructive to so much felicity. Know, then, that Mr. Howard lives, and is safe and sound abroad in France, at latest accounts. He is a sad scamp. There are many better men in the penitentiary; but that is neither here nor there. He is *your* stumbling-block, for he is Hester Howard's husband, and will remain so."

"Girl! I do not believe you," exclaimed Doctor Trevor, sternly. "Take care how you play with edged tools! Jests are out of the question at this season of affairs, and your levity is insupportable and most unwomanly. Be silent, or speak the truth alone. You sport with fire!"

She shrank from the expression of his piercing eyes, his cold, defiant face. She had not thought to rouse him to such passion; yet she said, after a moment's pause,

"You *do* believe me, else why are you so pale, so excited, so angry, even? Your words belie your countenance, and your rudeness proves your conviction. You know that I *have* spoken the truth to you, Doctor Trevor, from first to last, and I have lost your regard forever by these means. Oh, that truth should be so terrible, both to speak and to hear!"

She turned aside and wept passionately, while he, unmindful of her suffering, rose and paced the room with long and hasty strides, his hands locked behind him, his head bowed on his breast.

"It matters not," he said, in a low voice, suddenly pausing and confronting her, "whether this be truth or a malignant falsehood. The obstacle is one that can be removed, and *ought to be*. I am not impatient by nature. I can wait for such great happiness; wait one, two, three, nay, several years, if these be needful wherein to establish her right to independence.

"But I shall know everything soon, *when she writes!* I understand now, I think, why this revelation was delayed. She wanted time to dispassionately consider her condition, and see the path of duty plain before her. It is plain, to my eyes, as I think I can make it to hers, and to those of all just persons. For the rest I care not."

"Thank you," said Mattie, curtly. "I am one of the unjust, I suppose."

"Child, child, I was not thinking of you at all in speaking those last words. I was soliloquizing, rather, I believe. It is a habit I have, a bad habit, born of solitude; excuse me if I have been passionate, I have not meant to offend you; I have not, indeed."

He bowed slightly, and turning away from her walked to the window, from which he stood gazing mutely into the street below. He was calming himself for the conflict.

Doctor Trevor was aroused from reverie by Mattie's voice. She had taken advantage of his averted face to draw from her pocket a little hand-mirror, and with the aid of the contents of her satchel refresh her toilet, and retouch her cheeks with those artistic dabs of rouge, beneath each eye, which looked, as I have said before, too daring for fraud, and too glowing for health, decidedly hectic in character, therefore most interesting.

This done, and all materials of aid adroitly withdrawn from sight, she had lifted the lid of the travelling basket her sister had caused to be packed for her benefit and that of her companion, and laid out upon the napkin spread by her own dainty hands over a dingy little table covered with greasy oilcloth, four china plates of a delicate and curious pattern, containing severally a roast fowl, a loaf of snowy bread, grapes, and last, not least, half a dozen of those celebrated cream-cakes, which no one but Miss Penelope Dean knew how to make, and which had been already so much enjoyed and praised by Doctor Trevor on the several occasions of their appearance at Briarheath.

"Doctor Trevor, will you turn and take some refreshment?" said Mattie, submissively. "Sister Hester had it prepared for both of us, and here at the bottom of the basket is a pint bottle of her pink champagne, packed expressly for you, with two glasses, like soap bubbles, to drink it from. I like to drink out of this invisible sort of glass; don't you? There is something so spiritual about it."

By this time he had turned and walked calmly to the table.

"I had forgotten that it was time to eat until you spoke," he said; "but I believe you are right in arraying our luncheon now; we have had nothing since breakfast, I believe; yet really I am not hungry; I had forgotten."

"Nor I," said Mattie, "but one must eat to live, unfortunately, and for my part I am somewhat exhausted, I confess."

He looked at her anxiously, all the physician in his

face. "You are really very much flushed," he said, "and your lips are scarlet, absolutely. Is it often thus with you, Mattie?"

"Often when" (she hesitated) "when I have been unduly excited; but don't question me about my health. Let us forget for a time that such a thing as sickness exists, and eat, drink and be merry, for 'to-morrow we die.' You know what the Bible says."

"You are too young to be an epicurean," he said, shaking his head gravely; "yours must have been a hard life, Mattie, to make you such a philosopher. Happiness seldom brings early wisdom."

"Hard!" she said, between her set teeth, "yes, grinding; but never so hard as now. I need no pills, however, and no passes."

He took no notice of her side remark, but helped himself to grapes and bread, leaving the fowl untouched.

"Shall I carve for you, Mattie? I prefer fruit myself; but a wing of chicken would be best for you, who are weak, and with it some wine." He helped her to both, then poured a glass of champagne for himself.

"Let us drink to our better *understanding*," he said, gazing at her cheerfully. She drank her wine at a draught, without a rejoinder of any kind.

And again they lapsed into silence. Suddenly the door opened, shut again; opened a second time, and Mr. Mulgrave entered. The train that screeched by the window five minutes before had brought him to the junction to wait the return of that which had flashed them down a few hours previously from Lynnesborough to Jenkinsville.

Never was there a happier interruption to a sombre tête-à-tête.

Mattie was on her feet in a moment, saluting Mr. Mulgrave, introducing the two gentleman, in her busy little way, with running commentaries on the merits of each of her two "dearest gentlemen friends." (Heavens! how I abhor that expression from a woman's lips!) "Providence was really kind to her on this occasion;" "merciful even," so she observed, "in bringing them together." Never was such a fortunate triangular party! Mr. Mulgrave had just come in time, too, she declared, to taste some of those delightful cream-cakes, with his glass of champagne. She had made them with her own little brown hands the day before (a monstrous fib), having obtained the very receipt that Bedreddin got from his grandmother in the Arabian Nights, through his lineal descendant, Miss Penelope Dean! She had hoped, in making them, that they might suit the palate of her dear friend, Doctor Trevor, but he had proved faithless to his allegiance, having testified his devotion to cream-cakes before—almost to the detriment of his health—and was now fast becoming a devotee of Bacchus, she feared, for he would touch nothing but wine and grapes, which were only intended for birds to peck at, in her opinion, particularly these Catawba horrors! A man, too, who had seen life, and eaten grapes that were grapes, on the Rhine!

It was incredible, but she was sure Mr. Mulgrave would not be so cruel, but do justice to her cream-cakes, which he did, to her consternation, by gobbling up five, after which feat he demolished nearly everything else on the board, and gulped down the last drop of wine, drawing out a pocket-flask of his own to conclude with, which he tendered, as his part of the entertainment, to his hosts.

He thought Mattie very pretty for the first time, and graceful as she glided about repacking her basket with its small but exquisite stock of china and fine linen. He watched her as a child might do a humming-bird, amused and half-delighted; and as he stood on the platform a few moments later with Doctor Mordaunt, picking his teeth leisurely, pronounced her a "devilish fine girl;" at which epithet that gentleman winced so evidently that his sagacity went to work to conjecture impossibilities.

"It will be a very nice family arrangement all round," he said to himself after they had parted—"the grass-widow for me, the little bright sister for him, Melissa for anybody that wants her; I'm sure I don't, and I pity the man that does. That style of stereotyped self-complacent doll-baby woman is abominable in my opinion. After all, there is something devilish supercilious about that Trevor—'*distangway*,' though, decidedly. We did not take at all, that was plain; perhaps, however, on further acquaintance, matters would work better. I must conciliate that man; he is one of your quiet, influential sort of nobodies, no doubt. I saw that at a glance. Truthful and all that sort of thing. How character *will* stick out! Thank heaven, I have taken good care of mine—no man can pick a flaw in *this* irreproachable attorney.

"Dreadful thing, to go to a lady's house on such an errand as mine, however. Yet it must be accomplished, and the sooner the better. The way pretty plain, now, I think—pretty—plain," rubbing his hands and weighing his two last words by dividing mentally each syllable equally. "Got only one enemy, and that's Melissa.

Brother Sutton, Sophia and all the rest favorable, no doubt, or can readily be made so; but a jealous woman is—the—devil!"

Leave we Mr. Mulgrave to pace the platform until his train comes along an hour later and takes him flying to Lynnesborough. In the meantime, Doctor Trevor and Mattie are ensconced at last in the commodious car which is to land them at Ilium by twelve o'clock next day, each in possession of that rare treasure, a whole bench, on which they may stretch their weary limbs untrammelled, and sleep the live-long night hours away.

For sleeping-cars were not in those days; nor did male chambermaids then carefully tuck in and cover crinolines, and peer with curious glances, lantern in hand, into sleeping faces in the dead hour of night, reminding one of Priam's visitor who came to tell him "of his Troy in flames."

These things were then, with ocean telegraphs and the miracles of military skill our late revolution has developed, in the near future of the present day.

Doctor Trevor having resigned Mattie Lynne safely into the hands of Madame de Winter, and bade her a cordial farewell, betook himself to his duties and his own residence, where he awaited impatiently for many days the communication of Mrs. Howard—waited vainly, until even his rare patience was exhausted.

After the lapse of a fortnight, he called on Mattie to inquire of her news from home, and found that she had received letters from both sisters, and that all at Briarheath went well. Something peculiar in her manner led him to push his inquiries further; but she parried these, skilfully at first, until, offended by her levity or want of

frankness, he scarce knew to which to attribute her behavior, he rose and said curtly,

"If you have any orders for Briarheath, let me have them at once, Miss Mattie, for I cannot longer bear the suspense under which I labor, and I am going thither."

"You must not, indeed," was her agitated reply. "Doctor Trevor, you must not, if you value your own peace of mind or sister Hester's," adding a moment later in an embarrassed manner, for, contrary to her expectation, the pale man standing before her awaited her explanation, without a remark or further interrogatory,

"Mr. Howard has returned to Briarheath!"

"My God! and has she received him?"

"It was by her invitation, I believe," said Mattie faintly, half terrified at the storm of feeling she had awakened. "He is in very bad health, and needed her attentions," she hastened to add. "Common humanity, you know, was at issue."

"And through whose hellish machinations has she been induced to do this?" he questioned, "not through yours, Mattie Lynne, I trust in God!"

"Oh, no, no, indeed. I had nothing in the world to do with it—was never more surprised—"

"Girl, I hope you are telling me the truth," he interrupted fiercely, "for whosoever has contrived this thing has done worse than to be the murderer of Hester Howard. That man—that half-bred Mulgrave! the wretched sniveller Sutton!—if I thought it was one of these," and he clasped his brow with his hand and ground his teeth audibly, as though to keep back his vain and bitter words.

"I assure you, Doctor Trevor, it was all sister Hester's

own doing. She heard that he was ill, and her heart relented."

"Pray God that he may die before he has time to kill her, Mattie."

"I shall do nothing so sinful," said the girl, bridling; "on the contrary I deem it my duty to pray very earnestly that he may be restored to health and usefulness."

"Puny hypocrite, I pity you," he murmured. "Your cup of revenge is full now, Mattie," he said sternly, "full to the brim; but take care how you drink of it, for death to the soul lurks in such draughts as these! Dear God! it is hard to bear," and the tears rolled over his face.

"Yes! this is why she never wrote to me as she promised to do, and this was the fatal obstacle she spoke of, that, had she never consented to his return, we two could so readily have set aside.

"But in doing this she has done everything; and all that went before, all of his life-long iniquity and baseness, in the eyes of a clear-sighted jury, no matter what angels think or say, is now expunged, and the brand is sealed upon her brow for life—the brand of ignominious slavery.

"I cannot think that she knew this, I cannot believe it. I fear she has been ill-advised, over-persuaded, intimidated even, poor, noble, suffering, self-denying angel that she is. May God in his mercy bless her." And he turned away, cold and white as one that the cholera plague has stricken. For the iron had entered his soul.

CHAPTER III.

A SUDDEN STROKE—THE WRESTLE IN THE TENT—A
DREARY DAWN—DETERMINATION.

NOW to go back a little. It was evening when Mr. Mulgrave entered the library at Briarheath, so quietly that for a moment after he had crossed its threshold, the lady, who sat writing fast and intently before the blazing fire, failed to remark his presence. She had written sheet after sheet of the long and evidently interesting letter that engaged her, before he came; and now, turning to the piled-up leaves beside her, she grasped them as if to read them over, with a face so sad, so pale, so impassioned, that she seemed transfigured for the moment in the eyes of her unperceived visitor.

"She is writing to her husband," he thought, "the unprincipled scamp who is destroying her. Nothing else could stir her so profoundly. Can she know what has happened, I wonder? But it is time I should reveal myself," and he advanced to greet her, accosting her by name, and with the outstretched hand of permitted friendship.

She rose to receive him, calmly yet not without an amazed expression on her face, for after their recent settlement she had not expected him so speedily again; and from the first she feared some ill tidings.

Yet even in that moment of surprise she did not forget (and he remarked this) to gather up her papers again, relinquished for an instant at his approach, and place them securely in her desk, locking this, after she had

done so, with a small key suspended from her guard-chain, and pushing the light stand that sustained it entirely aside.

Then she came and stood beside him on the rug, looking at him with sad, prophetic eyes, and clasping her hands eagerly before her, yet speaking no word of interrogation, and thus she waited for him to announce his errand ; a grievous one, she felt.

"You did not expect me quite so soon again, Mrs. Howard," he commenced. "I have startled you. Perhaps we had better sit down before we commence our conversation," and he drew forward the two deep chairs that filled the chimney corners and entrenched himself in one.

She obeyed his suggestion mechanically, still waiting, watching, suffering, evidently ; yet unable or unwilling to frame a question. She knew now that there was something to communicate ; *what*, she would fathom presently, soon enough it might be for her peace, and to satisfy her gloomiest forebodings.

Mr. Mulgrave spoke at last. "It is the old business, Mrs. Howard," he said. "I am sorry always to be a bird of evil omen, but you must know these things."

"Surely I must," she made low answer, "it is you who are unjustly burdened ; not I. Proceed, I *beg*." Her impatience was extreme now, despite the reticence of her manner, the courtesy of her words.

"He has been drafting again," said the attorney, in his clear, metallic tones.

"So soon ? not heavily I hope, Mr. Mulgrave."

"Yes ; *very* heavily. It is all, this time."

"I will not honor his draft," she exclaimed, rising to

her feet, while fire flashed from her eyes, and her emotional lips quivered and crimsoned. "Let it go to protest."

He smiled his inscrutable, gleaming smile as she spoke, shook his head gravely, partly at her womanly ignorance of affairs, partly at what yet remained unrevealed.

"It is worse than you think," he said, "and I honor your determination to be, I hope, thereby confirmed by what I am about to tell you. This time it was forgery, discovered, fortunately, before the money was paid; forgery of your name and mine. He is now under arrest in New York, whither he had ventured under the assumed name of Lennox."

She stood transfixed for a moment, then seated herself again helplessly in her chair, leaning back, pale and speechless. He thought she was about to faint, and rose to be in readiness to assist her; but motioning him away she sat upright with a strong effort, and fixed her eyes upon him, one hand clasping the arm of the chair she occupied, the other lying loosely on her knee; her whole attitude was piteous.

"I would to God I could have spared you this shock," he exclaimed, with true manly fervor, "but it was impossible in the very nature of things; nor have I the tact to soften blows like this. I would I had. I would for your sake I could bear every evil alone that menaces you. Let me counsel you at least, while I dare do so, as long ago I would fain have counselled you, had I not feared to offend. But in the face of such offending, I must speak now. Cast off this villain, whose very name is contamination. You can do this honorably now, and without an effort. The law he has offended divides you,

and is in itself a divorce. In this State a felon has no wife. Let public justice do this *private* work, from which you have so delicately shrunk heretofore, and be rid of Julius Howard and his crimes forever."

"A felon! my husband a felon?" she murmured low. "Oh! has it come to this?" and she passed her hand gloomily across her brow, then let it fall helplessly again.

He clasped it now, unchidden, unrepelled; one thought possessed her to the exclusion of all else (and his impassioned manner was lost on her for a time), the thought of shame.

"Not your husband!" he said fiercely, "never your husband since the day he forsook you openly; never worthy to be so from the first, and a candidate for the penitentiary now, if justice have her course, *and she shall have it*," he muttered low, but not unheard by Hester, who, suddenly withdrawing her hands, lifted them both to her brows and looked at him with a wild and frightened expression that stirred him to the soul, and showed him what error he had committed.

He was on his knees before her now. "Darling, it is the only way to emancipate you," he said, "without trial and exposure both: the only way in which you can ever be made to feel that you are free—to begin your life again—and lean on a heart that loves you. Forgive me if I am abrupt and rough in my expressions, and vengeful towards that man who has wronged you already so sorely; who would bring you to beggary again, were it in his power to do so, and were there not one left to defend you with his life."

She turned her head away, groaning bitterly; unconsciously he was pleading the cause of another, arraying

a great temptation before her, though not in the way he intended.

"Do not speak to me thus, Mr. Mulgrave," she said, rising, after a pause, "nor seek to tempt me further; my heart is broken."

Her words admitted of misconception, certainly, vague as they were. A sudden light flashed over his features. He too arose, and leaning against the marble mantle-shelf surveyed her passionately, as she stood gazing down into the glowing fire, pale and wrapped as a spirit.

"You *must* hear me," he said, in suppressed and impassioned tones, very different from his usual vibrant ones. "This once I claim your forbearance, for I have loved you long and kept my secret faithfully. From the hour I first saw you in California up to this moment you have been the idol of my being. I have not approached you with any manifestations of my passion, but it has been a consuming fire since first the splendor of your gaze lighted it to flame, and there have been times when to fall down and worship you has been an impulse with me difficult to withstand. Yet in all this I looked to the end that we are approaching now. I have never dishonored your immaculate purity by a word or a thought unworthy of your noble womanhood. I bided my time. Say, Hester, say, has it come? Will you be my wife?" He stretched his arms passionately towards her as he spoke.

"Mr. Mulgrave!" It was all she said or could say. Some bitter reflection seemed to choke her utterance, and the words she would have spoken sank gurgling in her throat; yet she waved him away mutely with her white, uplifted, warning and beseeching hands, and turned her

head mournfully aside, like one in a troubled and uncertain dream.

He pitied her inexpressibly. "She were more or less than woman could she feel otherwise just now," he thought. "She must have time. There is nothing like consideration," and in pursuance of this idea; he said aloud, inspired by a fresh spirit,

"Do not answer me now, dearest lady. This shock has unnerved you. I will wait here until to-morrow evening if you do not forbid me to do so, and then I will try and bear with firmness any resolve of yours. But, oh, madam, madam," he added, impetuously, "do not drive me to despair! nor cast away from you for a false estimate of duty, a heart that adores you, and a long life of usefulness and happiness! For, Hester, to make you happy shall be the study of my existence!" and again he took her passive hands in his and covered them with kisses, hands coldly yet quietly withdrawn at the next moment. "I have never loved any other woman, I never shall again!" he pursued, with folded arms. "Beware how you wreck my solitary hopes!" he said, gloomily. "There are depths in my own nature that I am afraid of; you have it in your power to fill even these with light and loveliness, or to evoke from them dark spirits, and make me, perhaps, wholly evil. Think of this; think of the power you wield for good or ill!"

"Truly it is fearful!" she rejoined, vaguely.

He felt that she was referring his words to her husband's condition rather than his own.

"But justice should be done," he added, sternly, "even at the cost of some individual suffering. To falter now

on the path of rectitude were self-contempt. No one has a right, in the view of the whole world, to pay a premium for iniquity, and forbearance becomes a crime when it ceases to be a virtue."

His words impressed her strangely. They seemed to come to her from afar off, and to have no individual reference or meaning. She listened like one spell-bound rather than attentive. Afterwards, she remembered that scene as one would do a nightmare. At the time she made no answer; nor, perhaps, did he expect one.

Presently Lora came in with a tea-tray, the frugal supper of her mistress, to which she had voluntarily added some substantials in honor of Mr. Mulgrave.

"Take me to my room, Lora," said Mrs. Howard. "I am faint to-night. Tea? Yes, one cup; there, thanks! Nothing more. Make yourself at home, Mr. Mulgrave, until to-morrow. Have patience with me and *him* until I come again. Good-night!"

She was gone. He heard her slow step ascending the stairs through the open door, that step heavy for her, usually so light of foot.

"It has struck her to the heart," he thought. "No wonder! What in the shape of trouble equals degradation?" (People understand this word differently sometimes.) He stood musing on the rug, when a sparkle at his feet attracted him. He stooped and picked up the curiously-cut key of the desk he had seen Mrs. Howard lock, and after examining and admiring its exquisite workmanship—for he was an amateur in keys—he twirled it mechanically in his fingers while he pursued his chain of thought.

Wearied of this, he began to move restlessly through

the apartment, still dangling the key, and looking at picture after picture on the walls until, tired with their sameness, he came back to his old position on the hearth.

Books there were in plenty and of good choosing, but he did not feel like "settling down" to one as he would have expressed it. He had no habit of continuous reading, and newspapers were not at hand; yet there were two long hours to kill before bed-time, and no munitions of war wherewith to slay the enemy. He could not even play the piano, which had always seemed to him the most desperate sort of assault on time that humanity was capable of, and old Mr. Steinbach was not forthcoming on this occasion to do the deed. As to the two young ladies, Lora had told him at the door that they were "dun gone"—Miss Mattie back to school, as he knew before; and Miss "Melissy down to Sliding Stone, wid de Suttons, to git up her fall fixins afore she cums back to mistus, to stay clean through de winter," and at the same time the sable dame had handed him Miss Melissa Lynne's card intrusted to her charge, on which was written, in a small, slanting hand, "I will return whenever Mr. Mulgrave comes after me." "See! she 'spected you!" said Lora, slyly, as he held it up under the hall lamp, and read it, carelessly enough, aloud.

"I see," said Mr. Mulgrave, with a slight nod of the head, which seemed to say "verbum sap" as plainly as lips could have spoken the words. "Tell her, when she comes, Lora, that I am sorry I hadn't the time to spare."

"I'll be sartain sure to tell her," was the rejoinder, and after this brief colloquy Mr. Mulgrave had found his way, as we have seen, unannounced to the library of the mistress of Briarheath.

"I wonder what she was writing about?" he questioned of his own brain, as lolling on the cushioned sofa which he had dragged up before the fire (unceremoniously in his lonely condition), he prepared to make himself thoroughly comfortable for the evening. This was after James Sellers had been in to draw off his boots and give him slippers, and a few cigars, articles always provided for Mr. Steinbach, and had set his bed-room candlestick in readiness.

"The same chamber, sir, you slept in before. Can you find your way alone?"

"Oh, certainly, James; but what's your hurry? You went with me before, I remember."

"There's a ball down at Lynnesborough, and the mistress said we could go, Kitty Cline and me, and shure she's waitin' on me—the girl I mane—this blessed minute to escorch her, and it's the cook that's sick to-night wid de sick headache, and as to Lora, she goes to bed as regular as Myra Clay, in the mistress's own dressing-room. 'The ould and the yooing must be rigular,' is Mrs. Howard's rule, and so all the waitin'-up falls on Kitty and me—but it is not much of it we has to do in this quiet place."

"No harm done then, James, in any case," said the attorney. "Here take this to drink my health with at the ball, you and Kitty. Have a bottle of champagne, like a gentleman," and he handed him a half eagle.

"It's too much, your honor," said James, reverently, pocketing it hurriedly, as he spoke, however.

"I believe it's my first present to you, James; but it shall not be my last, if matters work as I hope they may," and he nodded his significant nod at the smirking Irishman.

"You has my best wishes, Mr. Mulgrave, for your success, and Kitty's too," he replied. "You was the nag *she* bet on from the first."

"So there's another nag entered for the field, is there, James?"

"I can't say, your honor; none that equals you, I'll wager, any way."

And he made an abrupt exit just as the worthy inquisitor of the sofa was about to put his legal screws on him (a torture only deferred in his case, as he knew, to another day), an exit which was probably a politic dodge on the part of James to secure another bribe, and elicit fresh promises of reward.

"Maybe it wasn't to her husband she was writing after all when I came softly in upon her," thought Mulgrave, after James had disappeared, and the clang of a turning key admonished him that the house was closed for the night. The hints of "another nag" in the field had set his detective brains on fire. His hand still closed over the little steel key that had pleased him for a plaything from its curious workmanship and wards. The unconscious desk still reposed in modest reticence on the small ebony stand it matched in size and material.

Mrs. Howard's chamber was overhead, he knew. All was quiet above stairs, and he could hear the least foot-fall on that sounding stairway he was certain; besides, she would not come back, he felt assured of that, nor Lora reappear in all probability, and these were all he need apprehend in the absence of the white servants.

We have seen before that he was not over scrupulous when detection could be avoided, by which he meant "degradation," I suppose; a very Spartan in his code of

honor, acknowledging no internal standard of right and wrong, just as some people think the reflection of an object in a mirror is caused by the human eye, not independent of it, and a creation in itself.

Be this as it may, an hour later found this male Fatima absorbed in the perusal of those mystic sheets Mrs. Howard had so carefully locked away before she gave him her attention, and in cowardly possession of the secret of a pure woman's life, never opened before, save to her Creator.

A reticent woman is not necessarily a cautious one, where her whole confidence is gained and given, and to the man she loved, and for his sacred gaze alone, Hester Howard had unfolded the inmost sanctuaries of the temple of her heart, and opened her life before him, as one opens a book, leaf after leaf, for the inspection of a chosen reader, with whom it is a pleasure and privilege to peruse each page in turn and analyze every passage.

Truth was there, unmistakable and unperverted—he saw that, for he was a judge of that foreign article—from the first word to the last; truth such as Eve might have spoken before the serpent beguiled her ear, simple, serene, eloquent, and never transcending good taste.

In this brief autobiography, all the more pathetic from the very fact that no effort was made for the sake of effect, and the details of suffering were so rigorous and even homely as to be often severe, Hester Howard had uttered her cry for mercy. She left to the decision of him she loved what her future course of conduct should be. If he in his pure and severe judgment thought her entitled to manumission from her yoke, she would openly, she promised him, apply for such freedom as the law

could give; otherwise she would abide in harness to the natural end of one of two opposite and perfectly unsuited lives.

What deeper evidence could a woman give of her confidence in, affection and respect for the man of her choice, than in submission like this to his fiat?

Mulgrave winced under this conviction as he read sentence after sentence, page after earnest page, attentively, and his temples throbbed heavily, while a sullen flush rose to his olive cheeks.

"So this is the winning nag poor James referred to as entered for the great sweepstakes!" he thought; "this lukewarm pragmatistical quack doctor, with a face like a marble mask. By heavens, I hate the whole profession for his sake. I felt there was something antagonistic to my being in the very air he breathed. Oh, fool! blind fool!" and he struck his forehead repeatedly. "The little sister, indeed! He has set his eyes upon the moon and is not to be beguiled by a fire-fly! And she loves him, *loves him*; every line in this letter says so; but he shall never get it, never, if I lie in ambush for it ten years. My God, have mercy on me." He prayed unconsciously for the first time since his childhood. "Grant me her love, direct me how to win it, and I will yield all else. I cannot live and bear this blow! I feel that I cannot, and he to sit in civil judgment on her immaculate life; to decide (what else does the letter mean?) whether or not he will play king Ahasuerus, and stretch forth his sceptre to my queenly Esther! Oh, it is unendurable," and he shook his clenched fist in the air, then writhed on the sofa, covering his face with his hands for a few moments, and again sitting up, grimly composed the sheets together

and thrust them under the sofa cushion, for he rarely forgot expediency, all but the one he was still reading, the very last.

She had just finished her labor of love as he came in, that was evident; the signature alone was wanting. The letter ended with a pure and fervent prayer that both might find strength to do the will of God, whether in pain or joy, through weal or woe. It touched even the prejudiced heart of Mulgrave, to read this unaffected burst of womanly devotion, divine in its self-abnegation.

"What a life she has had, to be sure!" he murmured, tossing back his lank silken hair and pressing one hand to his beating, burning brow. "What a dreadful phantasmagoria that whole California business was, from first to last, and all because of that villain! Poor lady, would your choice had been worthier, for your own sake," and he heaved one of the few disinterested sighs that had ever left his bosom.

In the next moment his face darkened again.

"Curses on them both," he muttered, "but if one of the two *must* come here, let it be Howard the fiend, rather than Trevor the saint. I could bear to witness her misery rather than her love for another; and perhaps if that wretch returned penitent, and ill or feigning to be so, the perfect, fastidious man might pass disgusted out of sight, while I stand watching patiently, humbly, for a reaction of feeling, favorable in the end, to my hopes! Howard could not long keep up appearances; then there would be another outburst or desertion. That would be my time! I must *wait, wait, wait!* The disgusted Trevor would never reappear on the scene of action, after a duplication of difficulties, and the field would be mine—*all mine.*"

And as he spoke he swept out his long arms, then clamped them again tightly over his breast, where burned the indelible image of Hester Howard, a statue of snow, enveloped in living flames, still paradoxically retaining its pristine purity and poise, even amid volcanic fires.

As he sat thus, the door opened very gently, and a little red-haired maid came in and began looking diligently about the floor of the apartment.

"What is it you want, child?" asked Mulgrave, somewhat impatiently.

"A key that Mrs. Howard dropped—the key of her desk, sir. She lost it from her guard-chain. She has just missed it."

"Can you give me a glass of water, little girl? I am suffocating with thirst, and the servants set none here that I can see; I believe they keep it in the dining-room."

The child went as she was bidden, in quest of the "only thing that never disappoints us," as a wise man once said; and Mulgrave, seriously disappointed in other matters, lost no time in replacing the letter-sheets and relocking the desk, in which he had before carelessly left the key, fortunately unobserved by the child.

"It might have ruined me," he thought, as he drew a long, free breath, after dropping the key in his waistcoat pocket.

A moment later Myra Clay came in, as quietly as before, bearing the water.

"Don't wait for the glass, child; set it down and resume your search," he said, authoritatively.

"I will just take up the desk, if you please, sir, with me, and look for the key in the morning," she stammered out, a little terrified, it may be, at his manner.

"As you please. Did your mistress tell you to do this?" he asked fiercely.

"No, sir ; but I thought Kitty Cline might meddle if she found the key. She did so once, and spilt all the ink on the velvet lining. She was trying to write a letter herself, she said."

"Ah, you are right in that case to be careful. Did your mistress know of this?"

"No, sir ; Kitty Cline begged me not to tell, and I didn't. I heard her accuse the cat ; but she was vexed with me—my mistress, I mean—about it ; and I don't want to have her think hard of me again."

"You are a careful child. Here is some change for you. Look well for the key in the morning."

"Mrs. Howard does not allow me to take money from any one but herself," the child said, coloring vividly behind her freckles, as of yore ; "I thank you all the same, sir," and she retired, courtesying demurely.

"That child mistrusts me," muttered Mulgrave. "She is a born detective, I can see that ; but, my God, what is this ?" and stooping he picked up from the floor a fragment of paper evidently connected with the letter. It was headed "a sonnet," and ran thus :

"I will possess in patience, oh, my soul,
 Thy desolate dominion. Slow, sad years
 May come and pass ; the tide of feeling roll
 Against the shores of life in billowy tears,
 Ere the expected guest in light appears.
 The prince is long in coming to his throne,
 Not less shall it be kept for him alone.
 No other head, no other hand shall bear
 The crown and sceptre that lie mutely there ;
 Nor the imperial purple monarchs wear
 When they proclaim their state and take their own,
 Kneeling before the footstool—mine the care
 To keep these symbols free from mould and rust,
 In the long regency of patient trust."

On the other side were written a few words significant certainly of a good understanding.

"These lines embody the idea we were talking of, on that last day. Keep them: they were written for your eye only."

Mulgrave held the scrap of note-paper in his hand, reading and re-reading it, and trying to puzzle out its meaning, while the cold perspiration absolutely dripped from his brow. At last, a bright idea seemed to seize him, and he thrust both key and sonnet into the grate, watching the last shrivel and curl with an almost malignant enjoyment, as if in its imaginary agony, but benevolently scuttling out the key for its own sake after a moment's consideration, so that it found repose in the ash-pan, and might meet uninjured the eye of Kitty Cline in the morning.

"I saw the key hanging from her neck as she was standing near the fire," he mused. "It is all very natural, and the sonnet, too, *might* have been dropped out as she was putting up her letter. All right so far, and safe!

"And now the good fairy that inspired me to make friends with James Sellers, who carries the mail, while I was still unconscious of this letter, must aid me still further in capturing it on its way to the post-office. Once there, no redress is possible," and like Mattie, on a former humiliating occasion, he comforted himself with the reflection, that "all is fair in love and war," rubbing his hands as he rehearsed the pitiable saying.

I will point the attention of my reader to the word "redress" used in such connection by Basil Mulgrave, as characteristic of the man.

Justice was not an essential element of his character;

sophistry was: here lay the *chief* difference (different as they were in all other respects) between Doctor Trevor and himself.

How fared it in the chamber above the library, while that fierce struggle and surrender went on beneath—the struggle of passion, the surrender of principle? Ill, very ill; yet God had not withdrawn himself in the hour of Hester Howard's tribulation, and there were manifestations of his presence even during the period of its sorrowful continuance.

It seemed a strange providence certainly, that the very means of escape Doctor Trevor had suggested, as the only reasonable ones, for a woman's release from the thralldom of uncongenial matrimony, were set before her now. The key of her prison-door was in her hand. She could, without uncovering her scars before the world, or revealing the personality of her dreadful past—tasks inconceivably revolting to a proud, shy woman like herself—throw off at once and forever, through the agency of general law, her galling manacles, and clasp her rosy future to her bosom.

She made her mind an Areopagus, so she persuaded herself, in which right and feeling were called to plead on one hand, against mercy and self-sacrifice on the other. On one side she had arrayed her wrongs—a terrific host needless to recapitulate here, but which it pleased her in her vengeful mood to count over one by one as Indians count their scalps, then notch their tally on their tomahawks. To these she added the individual shortcomings of Julius Howard, his betrayal of every trust reposed in him, every compact entered into by him, every tangible right appertaining to others that fell in his

unscrupulous way, no matter how sacred in itself, or how great to them the suffering involved by such proceeding. She turned loathing from the picture her own hand had drawn; yet were these evils and wrongs dearer to her for the time than his benefits could have been before, because they weighed heavily in the scale of her inclination.

Her imagination laid bare before her two several futures—either at her command, she thought, for the mere choosing—two paths leading thereto, diverging from one common centre, the present crisis.

One of these futures stretched away, in her mind's eye, a bleak and barren plain, covered alternately with sand and snow; flat, boundless, hideous, desolate to traverse. The other she pictured as an Eden garden, filled with flowers and fruits and sweetest odors, green with fresh grasses, eloquent with bird music, radiant with sunshine; a garden sloping softly down with many pleasant pathways, to the shores of the great river of eternity; a spot in which the olden dream of Paradise might be revived.

Two faces rose before her, distinct as reality itself—one, the haggard and implacable aspect that had haunted all her young life like a distorted mask, a face such as she thought the old man of the sea might have possessed before age came to be his portion; the other, noble, calm, benign, beautiful, even in her eyes, as that of the angel Gabriel himself, or the marble Apollo.

The choice lay between these. Nay, more—between solitude, poverty, despair, and true and holy companionship worthy of angels, lay this choice. To be a wife in the true and noble sense of that so often misapplied word—to be *one* with virtue, honor, affection. To see

sweet children springing around her knees, noble and beautiful like their father, and bringing back that old dream of rapture long ago laid to rest, to abide with her forevermore—to know the joy of *his* love and approbation, who alone in all her life had filled her heart; his watchful care, by night and day, in storm or sunshine. This was her ideal of earthly bliss. And all this happiness was to be had for the branding of one little word on the brow of acknowledged guilt—“*Felon.*”

Truly in scarlet letters did it stand out before her. But was hers the hand to do this, or to refuse to lift itself in interposition?

Could she drug her conscience by any power of sophistry to the conviction, that in this case her neutrality was not complicity of action, when by the sacrifice of mere externals she could put away effectually from her husband's throat the stern clutch of the law, and save him from the ignominy of the convict's cell?

And then! what then?

Might not Doctor Trevor still judge her case favorably, without knowing of this additional aggravation, so conclusive in his manly estimate of woman's wrongs, and still consent to pluck her away from her fettered wretchedness, without the stern alternative of common felony?

It was an eager but not an earnest hope; and she put it away despairingly. For a night and a day went on this wrestle in the tent; but the dawn broke at last; the dark angel relaxed his hold, and the strife that had been taxing her very powers of life so severely was over and forever.

Food, sleep, rest, had been strangers to her mind and body, since the conflict began; but now, like David after

the child was dead, she rose up and ate, and bathed and arrayed herself (her resolution being perfect), and returned once more into the gateways of her common existence, from the outer wilderness into which she had temporarily withdrawn.

There had come to her a sudden light, like that which breaks from the storm-cloud sometimes, a spear of intensest radiance dividing the darkness and striking conviction to her inmost soul. There had come to her a still small voice, swelling, perhaps, from two little distant graves, whispering of duty and compassion, a murmur that had stilled the raging of the inward tempest as if by some divine mysterious influence, and allayed like oil on water the agitation of her billowy heart.

All at once she determined, as simpler women might have done from the beginning, to remain quietly at the post God had assigned to her, he knowing best her fitness for its requisitions and her own deserts; and bending her head above her clasped hands, her soul overflowed in prayer, such as had never before left her lips—prayer tranquillizing and profound.

Self had sunk into shadow now, in the light of that solemn word "duty," which, against all the wrongs she had suffered, and the eloquent pleadings of her counsellors—inclination and even, as she persuaded herself, human right—maintained its severe and simple and unsophisticated precedence, at the portals of her conscience, an implacable and steel-clad sentinel.

Was this the grace of God that ministers tell us of, and of which philosophers deny the existence, as an absurdity? or was it the mere utterance of an individuality that could not be repressed?—a sort of single-handed,

simple-hearted rectitude of organization, working, blind-fold and mole-like, against all the allurements of fancy and inclination, like the instinctive canine fidelity we hold so cheap, and count as a mere matter of course? Who shall answer me?

Reader, you who have gone with her hand in hand from the beginning to the crisis of her simple life—you who, perhaps, like her, have loved and suffered, and through these grown strong—do you recognize at last the nature of "*Hester Howard's Temptation*?"

She added, after arriving at her resolution, one page to her already voluminous letter; but in this no reference was made to the last offending of Julius Howard.

"If," she said, "the slightest misgiving exists on your part as to my right to claim a divorce in the sight of God and man from the husband who oppressed and forsook me, by reason of what I have here set forth, none other, yield to its teachings, I pray you, without hesitation. That you love me I already know and feel, and am grateful for; but I would not for all the happiness this world can give, unfit you for the next, even in your own estimation. When you arrive at those just conclusions, which must be the result of consideration in a mind organized like yours, write to me at once, and if your conscience so decrees it, let our paths lie apart in this sphere of existence, in the earnest hope of eternal union hereafter.

"Believe me I am sincere in what I say, and that whatever counsel you give me will be accepted as my law of action without a dissenting murmur, for I love you too entirely, too reverently, *not* to believe in your disinterestedness and to array my judgment for one moment against your wisdom."

CHAPTER IV.

SUBTERFUGE AND STRATEGY.

THIS letter, as Basil Mulgrave had predicted, never reached its destination. It was sealed and sent away before its writer descended on the appointed evening to the library beneath her chamber to make known her resolution to the burglarious attorney, who had broken through the windows of her heart to steal its life-secrets, and to desecrate its treasures.

And this was the way in which the unscrupulous lawyer had managed to get possession, for the second time, of this momentous document.

Foreseeing that the precious epistle, whose contents alone he had so far purloined, would be sent to the mail, most probably, on the following day, Mr. Mulgrave had early addressed himself to James Sellers, the Mercury of the establishment, on the subject of conveying a letter of his own to the post-office, when next his duties should lead him there.

"And sure and I can go at oncet, your honor," was the obliging reply of James, into whose facile lips this title of Hibernian respect had easily slipped, since the gift of the half eagle, which truth to tell had not yet spread its wings (the champagne suggestion, notwithstanding), but was reposing quietly in his chest, in the toe of an odd sock, in company with divers other coins of similar color and value—the prospect of becoming the master of a hostelry and of Kitty Cline's charms and affections being at the root of this newly acquired thrift of his.

"No, James, there is not the slightest hurry," was the calm reply. "The next time your mistress mails a letter will answer perfectly well; but be sure not to forget me. By-the-by, does any one else from Briarheath ever attend the post-office?"

"Divil a one, your honor; shure an' it's the mistress is a lady of the greatest discracion, and never intrusts her sacrets or business to famales, white or black, knowin' the triflin' nature of thim cratures."

"Not even to old Lora?" asked Mulgrave, with a quick glance of the eye.

"Not outside of her own bed-chamber, Mr. Mulgrave. For the matter of bills and letters she houlds to the opinion that a man's head is the longest, and I flather myself her confidence in James Sellers is complate, all the more that writin' was left out of his edication."

"Which shows her good sense, certainly," said Mr. Mulgrave, urbanely. "James, at what time do you usually carry the mail to Lynnesborough?"

"In the evening, sir, when I fetches back the letters and papers that comes in by the eastern train; about sundown, say."

"I will have my letter ready by that time. Is there any sealing wax here, do you know (envelopes you have, of course), or does your mistress use wafers?"

"No, indade, sir; it's the best of scarlet sealing wax, and stamped with her own saal. She always uses a big L, as long as my finger nail; that's all I make out. Shall I borry a little for you? Lora can get it widout troublin' her, I reckon; you'll find envelopes in the book-case drawer."

"No, no; it's quite immaterial," and so Mr. Mulgrave,

having red sealing wax of his own always at hand, employed himself that day in cutting a seal of wood with a capital L thereon of the length described, and having satisfied himself of its efficacy to produce impressions, drew forth an envelope from the drawer specified by James Sellers, stamped with a simple L, like the seal itself, and proceeded to enclose therein a certain useless law document of about equal thickness with the doomed letter he was planning to entrap, and direct it to an imaginary person at Ilium.

"There will be a general resemblance between the name of 'Morgan Turner' and that other that will satisfy, as well as the direction, the outside measurement of words—all that James would probably look to," he thought, "even if he looked at all; but I was satisfied when here before that chirography was an occult mystery to him, when he brought me Melissa's love-letter from Evans, and carried my client's epistle to her. *That* was a rich production certainly!"

And he laughed low in his derisive way. Which of the two letters he meant to designate I leave to the imagination of the reader.

"I flatter myself I have reproduced that flowing hand of hers tolerably well in this superscription, considering my want of practice in the heart of caligraphy," he said, in a self-gratulatory manner, "and the whole letter has a neat and feminine air—seal and all—that pleases me," and he turned it about admiringly.

"Doctor Morgan Turner will be gratified, no doubt, when he receives this epistle, which will find its way to the dead-letter office without fail, as soon as he has done with it. Now it would be something singular if there

was such a physician residing in Ilium! How this fragment of a suit of 'Green *versus* Meigs,' brought by old Carey Fox, ten years ago, would mystify him! It was a clever oversight after all, my bringing it with me instead of White's appeal. I must have picked it up when the old man's trunks were left in Mitchell's law-office, where I domiciliated a while so charmingly."

Reminiscences such as this reference gave rise to amused Mr. Mulgrave, no doubt, as he chuckled for some time; but as they might fail to entertain my patient (?) reader, I will cut them short; having introduced this clue of thought merely to show how difficult it would have been under any circumstances to have traced back this proceeding to our astute attorney.

When James Sellers came along about sundown—as he had foretold he would do—with his little black office-bag in his hand, key in lock (his responsibility was insured in this way), Mr. Mulgrave was ready with his letters, one of which was concealed in the sleeve of his coat, however.

"Could you give me a match, James?" he asked, carelessly. "I haven't one, I find."

The bag was set down a minute, while the attendant fumbled in his coat-pocket.

"Drop your letter in the bag, Mr. Mulgrave, if you please, while it sets on the table. I lift it unlocked on purpose," and Mr. Mulgrave dropped in two instead of one, dexterously and swiftly securing and substituting the only occupant of the satchel—a portly package—with whose contents he was already pretty well acquainted, and which, as he had foreseen, bore the directions of Doctor Mordaunt Trevor, Ilium.

He received the match carelessly, and striking it to flame, lit a cigar that he drew from his pocket-case this time (having used all those designed for old Mr. Steinbach), and saw with unfeigned satisfaction James Sellers lock the satchel, and deposit the key in his pocket.

Just then, Myra Clay appeared at the door.

"Mrs. Howard says please get a receipt for that letter from the postmaster she sent you by me, Mr. Sellers, and bring it to her when you come back."

"Yes, yes. I'll attend to it," said James, jamming his hat down hard over his brow, and muttering, "women's so curraous, anyway," between his set teeth.

The child lingered a moment, and then withdrew; not, however, until James had closed the back-door of the hall behind him, on his circuitous way to the gate. As Myra Clay gained the chamber of her mistress, Mr. Mulgrave stepped from the bay-window of the library, on the gravel walk below, and strolling carelessly along, managed to waylay Sellers at the gate.

"I want a word with you, James," he said. "You know by this time what stake I have at issue. Let me see that post-office receipt before you take it up-stairs, and I'll not forget your obliging disposition. I want to know the direction of that letter to be registered, that's all, I assure you. In love and war, you know, James, a man ought to circumvent his enemy as he can."

"You won't ask me to lit it out of my hand, your honor?" said James, earnestly, a little alarmed by the suggestion.

"No, no; not at all. I merely want to see if my suspicions were correct; the receipt will tell me."

"I understand, sir! A nod's as good as a wink to a

blind horse. Where shall I find you when I return from Lynnesborough ? ”

“Just here, James, where we stand now, *one hour hence*. Now, don't disappoint me. I shall time you ; be expeditious.”

“Won't it be too dark here, your honor ? ”

“I'll strike a match, James. All I want is a glimpse at that name, you know, and the receipt will show for itself. You need not be the least alarmed ; but, if what I suspect be true, I don't want to be wasting my time here, that's all.”

“Why not look at the back of the letter now, your honor ? ” suggested James, eagerly. “Shure, an' there could be no harm done that way.”

“No, no ; ” said Mr. Mulgrave, laying his hand on the arm that was about to disengage itself from the satchel. “That would never do in the world. I cannot stoop to pry into a lady's mail-bag, being her guest.”

“Where's the differ ? ” asked James, in a bewildered manner. “Shure, an' looking at the recate is about the same ting, it seems to me simple way of thinking ! ”

“There is an immense difference, I assure you, however, James. One is private property ; the receipt is a public record which any one may see. It is to be registered in the post-office books, you know.”

“Yis, I know,” said James, vaguely, as he turned his face towards Lynnesborough, and visions of another half eagle flapped their wings triumphantly and blindly before his eyes all the way to and from the office.

Mr. Mulgrave was waiting for him, according to appointment ; his cigar shone like a star in the gathering twilight, as James Sellers approached.

In another moment the receipt was extended towards the expectant lawyer, and snapped from the fingers of James Sellers before he could remonstrate. A match in readiness was hastily struck against the gate post, by the transient light of which feeble torch Mr. Mulgrave glanced over the precious document he held, and which was restored, seemingly, to the bewildered James in a space so incredibly short that it seemed to him magical how human eyes could make out writing with such celerity. The whole proceeding occupied little more than the lifetime of a match, and redoubled the respect of the Irish Mercury for the genius of the Yankee barrister from that hour.

Again a cunning substitution had been made by means of a paper prepared in the interval of the absence of James Sellers; the common formula of a post-office receipt being intimately known to Mr. Mulgrave as a part of his weekly requisition in his business.

So that Mrs. Howard received the satisfactory assurance ten minutes later that her letter to Doctor Mordaunt Trevor had been mailed and registered. No individual signature was affixed, it is true. The "postmaster of Lynnesborough" alone appeared at the foot of the receipt, and it was thrown carelessly aside in the moment after it reached her hand, without close observation, comment or scrutiny of any sort. At the time it satisfied her of the fidelity of her messenger; the letter being an important one to her, though without intrinsic value, and its safe transmission to the office all she cared to know. There was little doubt that it would go straight afterwards!

Had it not been for that post-office receipt she might have written again, at the end of a certain time, to

inquire of the fate of her letter; but as it was, confident as she felt that it had been carefully forwarded, she could not bring herself to do this, especially after the occurrences of the intervening fortnight.

"It must have reached him," she thought, "but he has heard other news by this time, and his whole feeling for me has undergone a revolution. O God! O God! out of the full chalice of thy chastisement, could there not have been poured a different retribution?"

But why anticipate? At the time we write of no doubt of a reply to that letter, such as her soul must be satisfied with, even though her heart rose up rebelliously against it, disturbed her mind. She had enjoined her whole being to patience, and her resolution to take no advantage of her husband's violation of common law, in her own social grievance, was fixed and firm, and gave strength to her demeanor.

After the lamps were lit in the library she went calmly down and confronted Mr. Mulgrave.

The word "confronted" seems stern for a social interview; but gives a perfect idea of her state of feeling, and even manner, on this trying occasion. From the moment she entered he saw her resolution written in her face, and so much had his insight into her heart (gained through that confiding woman's letter of hers) influenced his wishes, that he would have felt himself aggrieved and disappointed had it been otherwise than it was.

Mr. Mulgrave was standing on the rug as Mrs. Howard entered, examining a vase on the mantelpiece with real or assumed interest.

"Do you know the legend of this bas-relief?" he

asked, after a few commonplace greetings had been exchanged.

"It is the story of Ariadne," she replied, "very artistically told, I think. Don't you see the panthers and grapes in the scene you are looking at, and Bacchus reclining at some distance on the sand? On the other side you find her deserted; Ariadne, I mean. The figure is beautiful, I think, in its utter abandonment of grief."

"Ah! true, true. I did not recognize the artist's intention at first." How should he, who had never heard of the legend?

"The other vase is a continuance of the tale, or rather its commencement. There are two scenes there with Theseus, one in Crete, where she gives him the clue; both very fine. I was struck with the beauty of the designs in a book of such, that was sent me, and ordered them to be made in Sevres. I have committed no other extravagance so impulsive or so great, I assure you, Mr. Mulgrave."

"I differ with you there," he observed, gravely, and she knew to what he referred. There was a long silence, unbroken save by the tick of the clock on the mantle and the bituminous simmering of the coal fire beneath it. It was a weary interval to him.

Mr. Mulgrave stood leaning on his elbow against the mantlepiece, looking down. Mrs. Howard sat staring at the fire rigidly and quietly in her deep chair; her hands upon the arms, her feet placed closely together and thrust a little forward, so as to disclose the tips of her delicate gaiter boots and the firm pressure of the toes within; the whole attitude indicating a sort of dreary, dogged resolution, wholly opposed to her nature. Her very lips,

closing usually so lightly and softly above her teeth, were firmly compressed now, in this new phase of feeling, mayhap of desperation.

"What has come to her?" he thought, as he glanced up at her furtively once or twice. "She looks like a thing of marble this evening." Ay, what indeed!

"Mr. Mulgrave," she said at last, in low but perfectly clear tones, "I have determined to honor that draft we spoke of, though it take all I possess. Don't remonstrate."

"You are your own mistress," he said, bowing low. "I am your agent merely. I have never lost sight of that fact for a moment, even when presuming to advise you. Yet I have in this case my own injury to redress. The forgery was of my name as well as yours, and I confess I feel indignant."

"The loss will be wholly mine," she rejoined, coldly, gazing steadily at him as she spoke.

"True, true; as far as the money goes, but—"

"That settles and embraces the whole question, I hope," she interrupted, sternly. "We will drop this matter now at once and forever. My lands—"

"Are also compromised by this act of Mr. Howard's," he in turn interrupted. "He has sold the most available ones to a German prince, who is at the head of a colonization society, I find, and this nobleman's agent has absolutely come over from Faderland to take possession. I can, however, I hope, arrange this matter without any serious loss to you, or exposure to Mr. Howard. One tract will have to be given up, probably, at any rate, which will cripple your resources considerably for the present, as it is the one I had meant to place next in

market; but there is no certainty that this can be done after all," he hesitated.

She groaned irrepressibly.

"It is hard, very hard to bear," she murmured, "but it *must* be borne. Let us speak of it no more; it is inevitable now."

"Madam," he said, after a pause and in a manner of the deepest respect, "have you considered how Mr. Howard's annuity is now to be met? Your income is at an end. Your most available lands are disposed of, or will be soon. You will be seriously impoverished."

"I will work hard to keep him and myself alive," she made answer, "in one way or another. This is all I *can* do; and if I fail, may God help us."

"And Briarheath?"

"Shall be retained for the present, Mr. Mulgrave; of course, if the worst comes, it must be sold; but if I could live in one corner of it, and spin webs like a spider, out of my own brain, and so keep it, it would be comparative independence and happiness to me. If not, I have my old resource that you know nothing of." She shuddered visibly.

"You will have about five thousand dollars left when these drafts are paid," he said, after making a few figures with his pencil on a visiting-card that he took calmly from the mantel shelf against which he still leaned. He spoke without referring to her last remark. "I am glad to ascertain this fact; what shall I do with this meagre balance?"

"Lend it at good interest for my benefit, in your own name," she replied. "Let no one know I have any part or parcel in it. It will give us bread, if all fails. I am very grateful to hear of this—grateful to God and you;"

and she clasped her hands fervently, adding later, "Are you quite sure of what you say, Mr. Mulgrave?"

"Quite sure," and he looked at her with an encouraging smile. "For the rest, I will do all I can to wrest your lands from the grasp of Prince Haldeumyer; even the tract I spoke of may yet be compromised for, when it is known that the law *could* undo the whole proceeding of Lennox."

"But that must not be known," she said, firmly. "It is to save his good name—my husband's—that all this sacrifice is made; and the name he has assumed is but a flimsy veil that can soon be torn aside."

"I shall be most discreet as to his identity, believe me. Your will shall govern me in this, in all things; your wishes lie near my heart, Mrs. Howard. I would cut off my right hand rather than wrong or offend you." He spoke earnestly.

"I thank you," she said, "you are very considerate, very kind; very generous," she added, after a pause; "the burthen is almost greater than I can bear, for I feel now that I can never lift this weight of obligation you have laid upon me."

"When it ceases to burthen you, I shall feel repaid," he answered gallantly, and bent his head before her. It was well said and gracefully done, and she had never felt so much admiration for him as at that moment.

"He is chivalric," she thought; "how noble is his whole behavior! Every man is superior to him who is my husband."

All this time her sealed letter, which she believed on the wing for Ilium, was lying close in his bosom, still sealed with its great L. (her father's seal), as it remained

to the end; for the infatuation that led him to keep it prevented him from violating its contents a second time, and preserved the seal unbroken until that fatal day. But let us not anticipate nor reveal, until the time comes, the name of his Nemesis. Those women of wax do desperate deeds, sometimes.

At eight o'clock the hall bell rang, and Mr. Steinbach came in with a roll of new music under his arm. His presence and his performance were exquisite relief to Mrs. Howard, to whom conversation was weariness that night; but Mr. Mulgrave chafed under the infliction, and, making an excuse of headache, retired early to bed, after a single cup of tea, which, truth to tell, was all he needed after the prodigious dinner he had consumed that day as a consolation for his solitude. James Sellers had catered well for him, and fish, flesh and wine had combined to comfort and fill up his inward man. He was one of those persons usually temperate, who had now and then a gorging fit like an Indian, usually after some reverse, which he slept or walked off without further inconvenience. Such temperaments are more common than is supposed, both in man and woman, and ever to be eschewed as barbarous and inhuman at the source.

That night, Mr. Mulgrave wrote three letters: one anonymous to the Rev. Elias Crawford, in a feigned hand, informing him that Mr. Howard was not dead as had been represented, but about to return to his family. A second to Mr. James Lennox, care of George Grey, Esq., attorney, New York, advising that person to write immediately to his wife, imploring her intervention, which he, Basil Mulgrave, promised to insure on certain conditions, among which was his return to Lynnesborough,

before he should have time to receive a reply, in an apparently dying condition.

The third letter was to Mattie Lynne, informing her of the intended return of Mr. Howard to the bosom of his family repentant and in ill-health, and the entire reconciliation between himself and wife promised by such a step. The epistle of Melissa announcing the important event itself, and written by his advice, followed hard upon this communication of Mr. Mulgrave's, and was that Mattie showed Doctor Trevor.

It seemed to him to account for the despairing silence of Mrs. Howard, and filled him with indignant ruth, as we have seen, as he realized the extent of her sacrifice, and imagined the influences brought to bear on the mind of her he had hoped to call his own; but it shaped his course suddenly and sadly.

These letters Mr. Mulgrave took good care to mail himself, at a way station on his homeward road, early the next morning, and the consequence was that a few days afterwards, Mrs. Howard, still anxiously expecting Doctor Trevor's reply to her letter, received instead, a note from her delinquent husband, confessing his transgressions, and imploring leave to come home to die!

A physician's certificate confirming the truth of his own statement accompanied this mendacious application, and determined at once the current of events.

Had she known that the physician whose name was affixed to this fraudulent report had no existence whatsoever, and that by receiving her penitential husband in her house again she condoned in the eye of the law all of his past offences, it is probable that even Hester's wide-spreading mantle of charity would have failed to

cloak the offender on this occasion; the slayer of his wife's peace, and his own good name.

As it was, she acted on the impulse of her compassion, not without a secret hope that her trials would soon be over, though all that within her lay to lengthen the useless life of Julius Howard, and make it endurable while it lasted, she determined should conscientiously be done.

As usual, she acted on her own responsibility, and Mr. Mulgrave, who had, as we know, pulled every wire, afterwards mildly reminded her that in this complication of affairs he had not been consulted!

CHAPTER V.

THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN, MINUS THE FATTED CALF—
THE FETTERS CLAMPED AGAIN.

HOW had they met? If the reader feels the least interest in the principal personage of my story, this will be the question uppermost in his mind. How had they met—the wronged and the wronger, the true and the false, the gifted and the ignoble? Very quietly, I assure you; but I will try and describe the scene, simple and matter of fact as it was. It was evening. Mrs. Howard and her sister Melissa were seated in the library by a table, on which burned an Argent lamp; the first with her hand on a letter she had just completed to Mattie (the same to which an answer came some weeks later, delayed by an oversight Mattie afterwards alleged,

and enclosing Doctor Trevor's brief note); the last employed with her eternal crochet-work—the true Penelope's web of modern womankind.

Mrs. Howard had been relating to her sister some circumstances of her life, suppressed until then, and had, of course, before to-night, disclosed to her family the existence of her husband, and announced his expected return. To all this, Melissa had listened with breathless interest, and relief inexpressible. This Mulgrave question was laid at rest now forever by some words of hers, as far as Mrs. Howard was concerned. Badly as he had treated her, and this she persuaded herself of rather than believed (for that unheeded summons to Sliding Stone still rankled in her breast, and his careless message through Lora still lay like a weight at her heart), bitter as was her sense of slight and wrong, it was still comfort to her to feel that in all this her sister had no share, and she was her firm ally now forevermore. Mattie's earnest words of warning had come between them of late, as such words are apt to do, disown their influence as we may, but now their effect was over and forever. Her passion for Mulgrave had opened some sluices in her nature, choked up until then by false views and teachings, and her feelings went out to her benefactress as they had never done before.

"Sister," she said, laying down her work and resting her arms on the table, while she looked in the face of Mrs. Howard, "I am afraid I have done you wrong. I thought you were flirting with Mr. Mulgrave. I told Sophia so. Can you forgive me?"

"What right had you to think this thing of me, Melissa?" questioned her sister, seriously, in turn.

"Oh, those long, private interviews—his devotion—but you have not answered me: am I forgiven?"

"Certainly, Melissa, and entirely. Kiss me, dear," and she drew the girl to her bosom. "I have feared," she whispered, "from what I have heard recently, that your own peace of mind has been compromised as regards this man. If so, tell me fearlessly all about it, *all!* Has he said, has he done anything of the nature that has been reported to me?"

A recent letter from Mattie was at the root of all this, as Melissa shrewdly suspected, even as she lay passively on her sister's breast.

"What if he had, sister Hester?" she said, suddenly raising her face, all wet with tears. "What could you do in the case? what could any one do? A woman must suffer such slights in silence. This is the law of society; we must abide by its teachings. But who has told you of this, sister Hester?" she asked, after a pause.

Mrs. Howard did not reply, for something told her that the girl was self-deluded; that Mulgrave was blameless of having trifled with her feelings; and the question passed unheeded, perhaps unheard. It was evident, however, that poor Melissa was in earnest, and her inevitable disappointment filled the kind heart of her sister with regret, burdened as it was by its own woes and anxieties. For already the inexplicable silence of Doctor Trevor was gnawing at her heartstrings, and the shadow of an unwelcome visitor soon to come lay darkly over her threshold.

"Melissa," she said at last, "you must shake off these coils of undisciplined affection, you must indeed. No serpent could work you deadlier injury than does your

own heart. Turn to the man that loves you—there is Josiah Evans, young, rich, amiable, devoted to you—try and like him, Melissa.”

“Sister Hester, I can’t; there is no use trying, nor concealing the truth from you any longer. I lo—lo—love—Mr. Mulgrave,” sobbing convulsively, and again throwing herself on her sister’s compassionate bosom.

“Melissa, this is very sad; but if it comes to the worst,” and her eyes flashed vividly, “I will see Mr. Mulgrave on this subject. He shall not make my little sister miserable, if act of mine can interpose. He shall explain himself, satisfactorily at least, or come here no more—no, not even in his business capacity.”

“No, sister Hester, not for worlds—”

“This is true love,” thought Mrs. Howard, as she sustained and soothed the weeping girl; “true delicacy! I was wrong, Melissa,” she murmured in her ear; “I will do nothing to grieve you, nor pain your womanhood. Let matters take their course, and perhaps even yet the end you wish for may come to pass; be patient, be self-controlled.”

“I will follow your advice, sister Hester; it is always good,” said Melissa, sitting up and wiping her eyes; “but for my part I believe that misfortune belongs to our family, as far as the affections are concerned. There are three of us, all blighted at once—you and Mattie and myself. Your cruel husband is coming home, not to die, but to live; sister Hester, my heart forebodes this. As for Mattie—but what can that knocking mean at this time of night?” and she paused to listen.

“I heard the sound of carriage-wheels on the gravel road while you were speaking,” said Mrs. Howard,

gravely ; " we have unusual visitors, no doubt," and her heart misgave her, as she rose with an expression of anxiety on her face, and touched the bell, forgetting, in her excitement, the last words of Melissa's discourse, and never recurring to them again for explanation—even if thereafter remembered.

The door opened suddenly, and a form wrapped closely in a long, flowing cloak of black cloth tottered in, supported by James Sellers. It was that of her husband, she knew at a glance ; but wofully changed and blighted, as it seemed to her on that first hasty recognition.

She had gone forward to meet him as he entered, extending her hand, and calling him by name ; yet she could not shake off the cold repugnance that penetrated the guise of her compassion, strive as she might against such exhibition, sufficiently to receive his proffered embrace. The poor wretch would have clasped her in his arms, had she permitted him to do so ; as it was, he murmured with something of his old spirit,

" Good God, Hester, is this the way to receive your penitent, dying husband ? Have you no mercy left for a repentant sinner ? "

She did not reply, but busied herself in arranging the sofa for his comfort, drawing it up herself before the fire with Melissa's assistance. " Bring Mr. Howard here, James," she said at last in low, steady accents that seemed to come through her set teeth. " Julius, recline on these pillows ; let me untie this comfort, it seems to oppress you," and she loosened the thick woollen cravat that was wound about his neck. " Now, you will breathe better, lying quietly ; what refreshment will you have, Mr. Howard ? " and she bent above him.

"Nothing, nothing," groaned the miserable man. "Such a reception! but I deserve it all, I suppose. Boy, have you a little brandy in the house?—don't stare; I don't know your name yet, and we always say '*garçon*' in France, which means boy—no offence meant. Hester, send him for the brandy, if you keep such a thing. My physician considers it the first essential in my case. You see I am dying—dying from debility—they can find no other cause. But who is this young person, Hester?" whispering, "can't you send her away? I have so much to tell you—I have, indeed."

"This is my sister, Melissa Lynne, Mr. Howard," said his wife, without regarding his murmured request; "she was a very little girl when we were married; you have lost sight of her, I suppose. You remember Sophia Wheeler better, probably."

"Sophy, now Soph Sutton? Oh, I remember her, of course. Why she stood up with you, I believe, when we were married."

"Very true. Sophia and I were girls together. Here comes James with the brandy; shall I pour it out?"

"No; I will save you the trouble. You see, in my weak condition, I am obliged to take it raw," and he dashed down half a tumbler full of the fiery beverage, unadulterated, smacking his lips as he relinquished the glass, in his olden fashion.

"That is good liquor, Hester; where did you get it? I haven't had *such* a drink since I left Paris. By-the-by, you didn't expect me quite so soon, did you, now?"

"What a wretch he is, to be sure!" muttered Melissa; "uncivil and vulgar, as well as wicked. He takes no more notice of me than if I were a stock or stone." Just

then he rolled his dim, blood-shot eyes towards her, as if in self-justification.

"A pretty good-looking girl, that sister of yours, Hester; how old did you say? Oh! twenty. Isn't there another? which is the prettiest? I must not ask such questions! and why not, I pray? You look devilish well yourself, Hester."

Here a violent fit of coughing interrupted him; the habitual spasmodic cough of a brandy-drinker, as different in its sound from that of the consumptive as the chink of copper from the clash of steel; but often confounded with it by the inexperienced ear.

"He is far gone in a decline," thought Hester Howard. "Alas! alas! for his irresponsible soul."

"I hope he may die soon," thought Melissa, "and that the devil may speedily get his own. I don't wonder that she barely tolerates his presence; he is so thoroughly odious, and what an angel of mercy she is, to be sure!"

Myra Clay came in with a tea tray soon after, assisting James Sellers in his duties as butler, and timidly offered Mr. Howard a cup of tea.

"Where on earth did you pick up this speckled turkey egg, Hester? Or is she painted on purpose this way, like a pied circus horse? You always had queer notions of your own. What is your name, little ugly one?"

"Myra Clay," said the child, trembling with fright and indignation, and spilling the tea.

"Go up-stairs, Myra," said her mistress, with gentle sternness, if such a thing might be, "you need not wait on the table this evening. Mr. Howard, this little girl is a favorite attendant of mine; you must not be rough with her, she is very sensitive."

"Oh, certainly not; certainly not. Is the old woman living yet? old 'stick-in-the-mud,' I used to call her, you know," and he laughed feebly. "Can't you raise the old witch of Endor for me, Hester? I'd like to see how she looks," and Lora was summoned to undergo scrutiny, remark and ridicule, doubly bitter to her under the circumstances, and then dismissed in turn.

"I'd like to see my quarters," he said, after a time. "I'm as tired as a tumble-bug in June; these railroad cars shake a poor nervous invalid to pieces. I thought I should have died on the way. No servant either, and my valet de sham, Pierre La Tour (a first-rate fellow, and no mistake) won't be here till to-morrow or next day, or next week, may be. Mr. Quarles had to clear my baggage before it could come, and I left Pierre to bring it along. You see it was all mixed up in that cursed *arrest* affair, that Mulgrave quashed at last. As if a man hadn't a right to use his own," he muttered, not unheard by Hester.

The dreadful truth was dawning on her by degrees; he was impenitent, a desperate man, hardened by transgression, and acting only from motives of expediency. He was ill, certainly, but the last satisfaction was not to be afforded her of seeing him reconciled to God in his extremity.

She preceded him to his chamber, one of a small suite of retired rooms in the ell of the building, especially suited to the comfort of an invalid, and he followed her, supported by Lora and James Sellers, and groaning at every step. He flung himself down in a deep chair as he entered the chamber, apparently exhausted, and inhaled eagerly the salts tendered to him by Melissa, who

came in at the close of the procession from sheer curiosity.

"This is really very refreshing," he said, affectedly, at last, with a parting sniff at the vial. "So this is to be my prison!" looking around and shaking his head in a melancholy way. "Couldn't you do better for me than this, Hester? I shall be too lonesome here, I fancy."

"This is the very best and most suitable arrangement I could think of for you, Mr. Howard, at this time. There is a dressing room adjoining, you perceive, and beyond that a chamber for your attendant, and back staircase; besides, you only ascend the great stairs half way to reach this room, which you will find less fatiguing than climbing the whole flight, should you wish to come to the library occasionally. It is more accessible, too, for the doctor, who is old and corpulent."

"Valuable considerations, all, *in their way*. Well, I shall make the best of it, I suppose. Tell your lacquey to open my valise; what is your name, garçong?"

"Sellers, James Sellers, sir. Do you want your dressing-gown, sir? or what can I get for you?"

"Yes; get out my 'robe de cham,' and 'bonnet grec,' and my 'meerscham' (there it is, rolled up with my Turkish slippers). A man gets very luxurious habits in Europe, my dear Hester. Sellers, you can stay in the adjoining room to-night. Pierre La Tour will save you the trouble when he comes; and don't forget to put a cold cut and a glass of brandy and water by my bed-head. I wake up very much exhausted sometimes, Hester, and I suppose your dormitory is at some distance from me; and have the old doctor here betimes in the morning, garçong, and give me that box of Maxwell

pills, that rolled out on the floor. The fact is, I must retire now. I will not detain you any longer, ladies. Send Lora here, Hester; she has slipped out, I see. She knows my ways; besides, I want to have a little chat with her."

"Such ways!" said Melissa, maliciously, as she found herself ascending the stairway with her sister, from whose lips burst a groan so deep and bitter, by way of amen, that it silenced her levity, and filled her heart, apathetic as it usually was, with unconquerable sadness.

"You deserve a different fate, sister Hester," she said, as they parted on the platform, whence the stairs diverged, which conducted each one to the door of her own chamber severally.

"God is the best judge of *that*," was the low-voiced and solemn reply, which seemed to recognize doom, rather than discretion, in the fulfilment of the task enjoined, and, as it appeared to Melissa, voluntarily undertaken.

"Mattie might enjoy this," thought Melissa, "but I *cannot*. So Doctor Trevor is to be laid aside for this worn-out debauchee, who will outlive us all, I'll wager, and fill Briarheath with his drunken associates, when poor sister Hester is laid at rest. It seems great injustice, to me, and I wish I could rectify it; but I cannot, so I might as well stop grieving or thinking about the matter. As to Mulgrave, I will be even with him yet."

And a mysterious implacability of expression came over the doughy face, that seemed to harden it to stone, and the light blue eyes turned almost white, and emitted silvery sparks; and the soft lips were compressed, until the edges seemed rims of bone, white and distinct, and rigid;

nay, the very hair, usually so lifeless, made an effort to lift itself from the scalp, producing an effect which, once beheld, can never be forgotten. Such is the wrath of one of your waxen women, of which let all beware!

That was a sleepless night for Hester Howard. Her whole life passed in review before her eyes; her little children came and peeped close into her face, in the dim taper light, and she stretched out her arms to grasp impalpable air; Mrs. Carisbrook, in vivid presence, seemed beside her, just as she looked in their little parlor at San Francisco. Then, like a panorama, all her stage experience passed before her, and the thought that she might have to make the same effort again for her own support and his almost maddened her, so impossible did it seem that she could ever tread that thorny path again, so full of daily trials, of petty detail, of weary observances, all foreign from her feelings, her tastes, her habits. After the gray dawn had broken through the jalousied shutters and the thin, white window curtains, she slept, and dreamed of Mattie, of Doctor Trevor.

She saw them walking together in a spacious garden; his face was downcast and sad. She was talking earnestly. Suddenly he threw up his arms to heaven and fell dead. Mattie had stabbed him to the heart. With a low scream, she awoke. Lora was standing over her.

"Get up, Miss Hester, dear. Masta Howard's in a mighty bad way, seems to me. He has done sent for Doctor Patterson, and he wants you to come to him right off. James Sellers says, as how he thinks de def struggle am 'proachin' fast, but cook shakes her head, and tells de res' of your white folks to mind deir work and let well enough alone; as for me—"

"Well, Lora, what do you think?"

"I belebe he's jus' 'tendin' to work on your feelins', chile. Dat's wat I belebe, if de trufe must be told. Now stan firsum, Miss Hester, or he'll git his rope ober your horns before you know's wat's wat."

"I think he must be very ill, Lora, from appearances; give me my wrapper, and slippers, and stockings, and a shawl. I must do what I can to comfort him, for the sake of Christianity, you know, and heaven-born charity."

"Dar you goes agin, Miss Hester. Charity begins at home, I hears de wise folks say; anyhow I never belebed much in charity. I belebes in jestic, common jestic (dar's your slippers, Miss Hester), a toof for a toof, and an eye for an eye, *dat's* my notion; now, dar's Doctor Trevor—"

"Oh, Lora, you madden me. In a few days I shall know everything and be guided by *his* will; that is, that is, if Mr. Howard recovers; but if he is to die, I must do my duty faithfully to the last. Don't you know what I promised at the altar, Lora? I must take care of him in sickness, and you must help me, good nurse."

"I'll do dat, sure," said the old woman, dashing a tear from her eye, "dat chile has a way of puttin' tings home at a body dat would melt a heart ob marble. She kin jus' wrap her old mammy roun' her finger-pints;" and so saying, she followed her sorrowful mistress to the chamber of the unrepentant sinner and rebellious invalid, who was writhing in some real or pretended seizure of pain.

Doctor Patterson was already there, staff in hand, giving very active practical directions about poultices, hot foot-baths, mustard plasters, and cayenne pepper

bandages. He had already administered a pint of hot salts, and was preparing to follow it up with a dose of Fryer's balsam, when Mrs. Howard entered.

"Do you feel very ill, Julius?" she asked, in a tone of kind inquiry, taking his hand in hers.

"I am in dreadful pain, Hester; but don't let that old savage pour anything else down my throat just now," whispering, "he is perfectly ruthless; I know him of old. What is that dreadful thing he is pouring out?—It can't be brandy."

"Oh, no; it is a powerful old-fashioned medicine he is fond of administering. I hope it may do you good. Take it, Mr. Howard."

"No, I'll be d—d if I do," he roared; "there is such a thing as imposing on good nature. Take off these mustard hand-cuffs, Lora, and foot-cuffs too; let me die comfortably, for I suppose this is about the winding up of the thing. I leave you *everything*, Hester. Pierre La Tour will be here this evening, I suppose. Pay and dismiss him to his own country; he has been very faithful to me, but he wouldn't suit your establishment, Hester; he is a valet or nothing. Tell Mulgrave I forgive him for stirring up that muss, although he did put it down again. Marry him, Hester, when I am gone—I know you love one another—and receive my blessing and forgiveness."

Melissa, who had ensconced herself behind the bed-curtains at the beginning of this speech, burst into an involuntary titter of hysterical laughter at the ridiculousness of this last request.

"What was that noise?" asked the sick man, suddenly pausing in his tirade.

"He is not so flighty as I thought," observed Doctor Patterson, solemnly. "Reason returns. Let me test him further.

"Would you like a little—good old—Jamaica—rum, my—dear—Mr. Howard?—if so—I have—some in—my—pocket-flask, at your service—which I think—might—prove—beneficial."

"Thank you—thank you, doctor," gasped the patient. "I think it *might*—revive me somewhat. I feel a prodigious sinking of the stomach."

"Your pylorum is affected, no doubt, my dear sir, very deeply, and the diaphragm does not do its duty. Try this, Mr. Howard," and he added a little rum to the potent dose he had already poured out of Fryer's balsam.

"Fire! water! damnation!" sputtered the half-strangled man, "what have you given me, you blasted old heathen? You shall answer for this, sir; you shall indeed, as soon as Julius Howard is on his feet again." The old doctor only smiled benignly.

"So that—I—bring—you—round—again—my dear sir, I shall not—fear—your wrath,—which will subside—as soon—as a wholesome reaction of brain occurs. You are a little—bit flighty yet. Do you feel conscious of a—a—whirling sensation in the cerebral region?"

"I feel conscious that you have murdered me, sir, with your infernal liquid fire; why, my throat is as raw as if I had taken aquafortis."

"Oh, not at all—not at all," chuckled the old gentleman; "but if you are really thinking of death, I may as well go and send Doctor Elias Crawford to your assistance—I can do nothing further at present."

And the sturdy cane was planted in preparation for

departure. "I will look in again about dinner time, my dear madam; he is very ill, certainly, but there is hope; I cheer him with a little pleasantry, you know, and keep up his spirits; that is one of my professional strategies. I shall see him three times a day until he improves."

"What must he eat, doctor?" asked Mrs. Howard; "give me full directions about that."

"Gruel or panada, my dear madam, for the present. I shall exhibit twenty grains of calomel when I return, and his stomach must not be crowded in the interim. Keep him quiet, and apply the poultices. I shall blister him this evening, probably, and to-morrow." What dire threat Doctor Patterson next made was lost on the unappreciative ear of Lora, who had been sent to escort him down-stairs, and who very abruptly snapped his harangue in two by slamming the door behind them, outside of which he was delivering his parting oracle. She walked slowly behind the portly form of the physician with her sinewy old black arms—which she had a fashion of wearing bare to the elbow until her morning work was done—rolled up in her clean check apron.

"Now, den, master Doctor Patterson, wat does you tink is de matter wid Julius Howard, de master, I s'pose I *mus'* call him?" she muttered, as if making unwilling atonement for her undue familiarity.

"Really, my good woman, I—I am not prepared to say at this present speaking, and if I were, do you think you could comprehend my diagnosis? Answer me that, dame Lora."

"I don't know nuffin 'bout *dog-noses*," she answered, grumly; "but dis I *does* know, dere's no killin' disease

de matter wid dat bad man; he's got whiskey 'sterics, nuffin wus, an' a cravin' arter gin-toddy an' brandy an' such like, dat none ob your drugs can sativate; dar now! I done tole you my own min'! It's jes' trowin' away my mistis' money fur to hab a doctor callin' in tree times in one day to see dat wicked onsatiable sarpint!"

"Lora, you surprise me. Have you been drinking? Do you forget that you speak of your master, the husband of your mistress?"

"No, I don't forgit. I wish I could; den I mout hab some respec' lef' for dat missable impident sinner, coiled up like a copperhead-snake in his bed, jes' waitin' fur a chance to sting. We has had 'siderable comfort sence he clared out ob dis kitchen; but now de ole times is comin' back agin. I see dat plain. I 'spise him wors dan a 'babolitionist, *I does*; an' dat's about all I *kin* say on de 'casion. As to drinkin', you knows very well, masta Doctor Patterson, dat outside ob her coffee and tea, Lora nebber teches one airthly drop, unless a 'casional glass ob cool spring-water, or buttermilk, or peppermint sangaree. I has my church-letters fur testament ob my character brought all de way from San Francisco city, an' brother Cresswell, ob Lynnesborough, de celebrated preacher an' whitewasher, can gib his Bible oaf to my temperation!"

By this time the doctor was at the hall-door, where, for the last time, he planted his staff.

"I fear you are prejudiced, my good Lora," he said, blandly. "Do your best to comfort your mistress in her time of tribulation, and do not try to put unseemly ideas into her head, for I know you have great influence."

"All de influence I hab shall be used to 'spell dat

sarpint from dis Eden-home, as Miss Mattie Lynne dun called Briarheath, sence we fixed it up, an' arter dat, den we shall see 'bout oder matters. Does you carry any bug-pison in dem little saddle-bags? He, he, he," laughing mischievously.

"Why do you ask such a question, Lora?"

"Cause I was tinkin'—he, he, he—you *mout* make a mistake, you know—ha, ha, ha—wen you put out dat dose of calomel for mas Julius, jes' accidental like!"

"Take care how *you* tamper with such articles, my old woman," said the doctor, sternly, "if you expect to escape the last penalty of the law. I shall keep my eye on you from this hour, and it is now more essential than ever that I *should* come and go frequently. I shall acquaint your mistress with your infamous proposition." So saying, he departed pompously, though not without a furtive smile.

Julius Howard had obeyed the pointed injunctions of Mr. Mulgrave's postscript to the letter, consisting of this refined phrase:

"Strike while the iron is hot! Come while the fit is on! Don't wait for a reply; but follow on the heels of your petition; for there is no knowing how it may be answered, if at all. She has everything her own way now, and the law on her side; but come home and the tables will be turned. This is your only chance! You are gone up if you fail now!"

It was three months before the delinquent knew what his wife had written, and he was very comfortably entrenched and fortified at Briarheath, when her letter reached him, through the tardy consideration of his lawyer, to whose care it had been directed; her letter

granting him a reluctant yet not ungracious permission to return for the purpose of "dying comfortably!"

As to Pierre La Tour, he became to Mr. Howard what Mrs. Harris was to Sarah Gamp, and as he never made his appearance with or without the valuable luggage, said to have been left in his charge, was considered a myth, or a mystery, by two opposing parties in the house of Briarheath.

Dark hints were thrown out by his master that he had either gone to Texas on a venture of his own, or been foully dealt with in New York; dark hints never fully explained, which exerted a mysterious influence over some of the more superstitious members of the household, while they merely amused others, and mortified its mistress.

Among the true believers was James Sellers, whose time was pretty much taken up thereafter by the requisitions of a selfish Sybarite, considerably to his own advantage, however, it must be avowed, as he inherited all the cast-off clothing of the master, whose specialty it was to wear fine broadcloth, no matter at what expense.

I would not have my reader sit in judgment on Hester Howard's motives in admitting this wooden-horse into her citadel. She certainly had not apprehended such consequences as came to pass from her impulsive act; but had looked—it must not be concealed—over and beyond a grave for the full measure of her happiness.

She had believed the representations of Julius Howard, when she reluctantly agreed to receive him at Briarheath, or he never would have been suffered to cross its threshold, dedicated to peace and propriety, and held sacred for the coming of its true master.

Her error was none the less irretrievable.

BOOK SEVENTH.

O God! if it be thus, and thou
Art not a madness and a mockery,
I yet may be most happy.—BYRON.

When next in Broadchurch chapel he
Shall take his pious place,
He tells his past iniquity
And consequential grace,
Relates how long by Satan vexed
From truth he did depart,
And straight declares the time and text
That smote his stony heart.

HYPOCRITE'S HOPE—HOPKINS.

I'll have my bond! I will not hear thee speak;
I'll have my bond, and therefore speak no more.
I'll not be made a soft and dull-eyed fool,
To shake the head, relent, and sigh, and yield.

* * * * *
Now, infidel! I have thee on the hip.—SHYLOCK.

BOOK SEVENTH.

CHAPTER I.

SILENCE AND SUFFERING—THE LETTER COMES AT LAST—
MYSTIFICATION—AN EMPHATIC EXPLANATION.

MATTIE LYNNE made no mention to her sisters, either one or the other, of the passionate manner in which Dr. Trevor had received the announcement of Mr. Howard's return, nor did she, it may well be surmised, communicate the fact that she herself had told her friend of the existence of that gentleman on their way to Ilium.

That he had not received the promised letter she understood from his broken and unguarded expressions, when under the dominion of agony too sudden to be silently endured (as it was his wont to bear most of the troubles of his life), and had she mentioned this circumstance, of which she understood not and suspected not the cause (for to do her justice, she was in no direct complicity with Mulgrave), an immense relief would have been afforded Mrs. Howard.

As it was she could but feel the slight of this silence on the part of Dr. Trevor, for time enough had elapsed between the sending of her letter and her husband's return, *more* than sufficient time, she knew, to have enabled him to reply before that sudden blight was cast upon her hopes and his, perhaps forever.

Bitter as were her grief and disappointment, she was constrained to bear them silently. She was not one to seek sympathy for scorn or shame, or to make capital of her humiliation, and even to Mattie, in whose affection she confided, and who might, she knew, better than any other person, ascertain the truth with regard to the reception of her letter, she could not bring herself to mention this painful oversight on the part of Doctor Trevor, or intentional neglect, she knew not which to deem it. For she thought she discerned the peculiar fastidiousness of his nature, its sensitiveness to all exaggerated or overstrained feeling, in the manner in which he had treated and regarded her impulsive letter, in which her bleeding heart and mournful life had been laid bare to shuddering nakedness.

She could not doubt that this registered letter had been correctly forwarded; had she not the postmaster's assurance that it had gone through safely as far as Ilium? Why then was he waiting? Why did he not send her if only one line of acknowledgment (even if not ready to reply to it in full, for she knew that the habit of his life was that of careful consideration of every question)? Why, if it were not that its contents, its revelations, its very depth of confiding deference, had one and all surprised and perhaps disgusted him?

Lying upon her solitary pillow at the dead of night, she would feel her cheek crimson and burn, as she thought of that wild whirl of feeling which, less than a month before, had made her almost willing to be his at any cost, at any sacrifice, and, if needs be, to follow him across the world to find a spot where none should know her history or come between them.

True, he had never known of this passion of self-devotion, for, believing her to be free to wed him if she chose, he had not dreamed of urging flight, or concealment, or precipitancy of any kind, as the price of their union.

Afterwards she had made a carpet of her heart for his royal feet to tread upon, as Sir Walter Raleigh had done of his cloak for Queen Elizabeth, and spread it forth in that spontaneous letter, in recognition of which he had given no answering sign!

Oh, was he truly the cold and heartless man of the moment that Mattie had depicted him, even in her late letters—the man who had broken the heart of Ida McClane, as the sister of that lady had stated, then smiled scornfully upon the fragments lying at his feet, in his cold and Goethe-like strength of self-sufficiency?

“But were not these always the sort of men that ardent women loved,” she questioned, “even as the magnetic needle points to the frozen pole?”

“How can impulse obey impulse? How can weakness sustain weakness? and doth not the Bible say, ‘He that commandeth his own spirit is stronger than he who taketh walled cities?’ It was his strength I worshipped so, and the might of his great gentleness.”

Then throwing aside this mood as if she had dropped a mantle suddenly from her shoulders, she would rise up in her bed and lift her hands and sweet and tearful face to heaven with meek entreaties to be forgiven for her want of faith.

She would believe in him, come what would; yea, to the bitter end! As well might the mariner disclaim his allegiance to the north star, floating on the restless seas;

as well might the devotee denounce as an imposture the crucified figure of the dying Saviour, as for her to cast her loyalty and love in dust for him who was her earthly king.

The mild sceptre of his will had been stretched above her before she dreamed that his love had been a part of that subtle influence. Even through the portals of sleep had it entered her being, and transfused itself into her life unconsciously. She was his then and thenceforth, she was his now and forever, even though it might come to pass that their eyes, their hands, their lips, who had so loved, might never more encounter one another. The ring he had placed upon her finger so long ago was her only marriage-ring. She felt this now, though once that small pale circlet of gold that had legitimized her children had been to her a thing of undue importance.

But for their *sakes* she would put it aside forever, that symbol of fraud, and content herself for all consolation with that pure profile face engraven on the gift of Mor-daunt Trevor, and the dear name within, his first name, "Eric," and bending down she kissed the talisman.

Men and women who read this passage of a life condemned by some contrariness of fate to be practical in all externes, the lines of which had surely not fallen among congenial spirits, deride not the deep-seated sentiment of a nature that found no outlet, save in solitude!

After such a night as this, such struggles, such resolves, Hester Howard would take her place at her own breakfast board and forget no requisition for the comfort of others, no smallest divergency of taste in the puerile matters even of cream and sugar, dropping or pouring the one and weighing the other, to suit each palate

present, and following the capricious changes of Mr. Howard's appetite and temper with unfaltering patience and even heroic fortitude, strong as the word may seem in such connection. It requires this great quality to endure a nature so petty and contemptible.

For the man was old at forty, and in a sort of premature dotage, such as comes so often to the brainless debauchee. It takes intellect even to bear chronic intoxication, and the weaker brain goes down under the effect of alcohol far sooner than the strong, though both, we know, must ultimately deteriorate.

Mr. Howard had already "taken on," as the word goes, the loose and flabby flesh which betrays debility, even in the old, and the pendulous haggardness of his cheeks and chin, and the watery dulness of his drawn down, half-opened eyes (never in their best days a handsome feature), betrayed the deep inroads of dissipation on his constitution.

He had been constantly retrograding since he was twenty-five, a field of grain that had never borne a harvest, but been blighted in its half-developed condition, fruit green, but rotten, and therefore doubly distasteful to the palate. He had been born in decent mediocrity and gone down voluntarily to grope in the depths of imbecility and corruption.

Where his soul hid itself was difficult to surmise; or had he developed one at all, that is the question, after the first faint spark was kindled?

May we not be permitted to go so far as to suppose, in the faint light vouchsafed us on all subjects of religious jurisprudence by the Most High, that a soul may be confiscated as well as an earthly fief, if subjected to unwor-

thy usage, or in rebellion against its sovereign? And was not Julius Howard, as far as he dared proclaim himself so, God's foeman?

When the powerful and inscrutable hand of destiny is pressed over the fires of reason, so as to darken or extinguish them forever, we bow reverently to the fiat of our Creator.

To the last we cherish tenderly the warped and shattered tabernacle of clay, in which a deity once made its home, now galvanized alone by the motive power, alike, of body, and soul, and common to all animal nature, called life.

We regard the miracle of this separation as something awful and mysterious, inexplicable as we find it, and feel ourselves responsible for the preservation and well-being of that "temple not made by hands," which still survives its inmate, guiltless as we know it to be of the abandonment of its altars, the extinction of its flame. Not so the mental suicide! For him the stake and the burial at the cross-roads!

Even if unselfish enough to disregard your own weariness, my companion (for while you trace these pages we go hand in hand, whether we will or no), think of the long, dark years; long, even, if not numerous, our Hester's weary feet have still to traverse before they emerge from arid dust and sandy desolation to the green savannas that lie outstretched beyond, from the limits of that desert, rarely relieved by an oasis. Imagine these wastes, for they will not be spread before you, save in such glimpses as may lend comprehension to the whole; and again I call on you to pity her, their pilgrim.

For this woman had capacities fit for the companion-

ship of angels themselves, yoked as she was to dulness, corruption, and cruelty; yoked in one sense, if not another, for was not Howard the companion of her days and the acknowledged master of her house?

True, she had the refuge, not always accorded to mis-mated women, of her own chamber, and some solitary musings there; but her very occupations were subject to the wanton whim of her oppressor, and even when he knew that she was toiling for his bread, as well as her own, there were days when he rendered her unfit to grasp a pen, or collect an idea, or summon imagination to her aid, that power with which no compromise is possible, the very Vashti of the mind, as sleep is of the body, imperious, wayward, and not to be compelled to reverence, as is her sister, reason, the Esther ever obedient to the sceptre of circumstance.

It was partly through her very pity for his utter want of resource, situated as he was, that Hester became subservient to the need for amusement which predominated in the temperament of her husband. His feet were tender by reason of his potations, and he could not walk nor bear even to drive or ride continuously, and must be amused indoors, if possible, or taken out to visit in invalid state—insisting always on companionship, on these last occasions.

Melissa saw how her sister's trials were wearing her, and kindly came to her assistance as far as Mr. Howard would permit her to do so—learning *ecarté*, of which game he was passionately fond, solely for his amusement, and by permission of her indulgent and not altogether disinterested pastor.

She wrote also privately to Mattie, to say that she had

reason to believe her sister Hester was becoming sleepless again; that she had heard her walking late in her chamber, for many nights; and that she had that far-off look in her eyes they wore before, when the news came of the loss of Mrs. Carisbrook on the "Mount Hecla."

She ended by imploring her to consult with Doctor Trevor on the subject; and if he thought it essential, to desire him to come to Briarheath before matters grew worse.

Fortunately Melissa was mistaken in her forecast (it was only sudden shocks that hurled Mrs. Howard into this condition), for Mattie, in her reply, gave unanswerable reasons why Doctor Trevor could not possibly obey the needs of her sister.

As these potent considerations were set forth in a few words in a letter Mrs. Howard received some days later, it is not essential to record them here. Nor did Melissa, from some instinctive insight perhaps into the true nature of affairs, see fit to make any communication to her sister on the subject of Mattie's reply, or the request that drew it forth.

"She will know soon enough," she thought; "in the meantime, that poor pale face, with its perishing expression, shall not be rendered more pinched and pallid by me. For I know how she depended on his skill; and I see now, what I was blind not to have seen long ago—see now as Mattie does—that he was the person she preferred to any other. Only to think, that he has not written her one line that I can hear of, since he left Briarheath, not one, even through Mattie; for I put the question to her, plump and plain.

"Ah! men are all alike—out of sight, out of mind.

What was that the old song said about their having 'one foot on sea and one on land—to one thing, constant never?' Ah! Mulgrave! Mulgrave!" and she heaved a bitter sigh.

The time came, when all other excitements failing or being difficult of attainment, Julius Howard became the subject of what he chose to term "religious grace," under the droppings of the Rev. Elias Crawford; and was looked upon by many worthy Christians as a brand snatched from the burning, and a candle set upon a steep.

His wife's conduct in not "joining" with him was deeply censured by some who ought to have had more sense and feeling than to suppose that a pure and earnest woman could honorably consent to connect herself with a church, merely from motives of expediency, and to humor the vagaries rather than promote the welfare of a "serpent shorn of his fangs."

Money there was not now, for journeys or jollifications; and well-earned gout put manacles, as stringent as those of a jail-warden, on the ankles of the man, old, as I have said, at forty, from reckless debauchery. So he attached himself to a sect of sensationalists, rather than remain a nonentity, and pretty much on the principle of those sagacious little boys who tie their small apple or walnut carts to a mighty four-horse wagon going up hill, to get an easy lift.

"Better be on the safe side," thought Julius Howard.

The Rev. Elias Crawford, Doctor Hubbard Patterson, and Elder Sutton, all spoke of him as a most remarkable instance of change of heart through grace, and a burning light of steady progress and righteousness, coming, as he did, avowedly out of a life of sin and recklessness; for

he loved to discant on his past iniquities as a withered old maid will often enjoy to tell of her early conquests and charms.

It belongs to such organizations as his to prefer holding themselves up as warnings even to the world, to living on a dead level, or in obscurity; and in her heart of hearts, Hester Howard despised him more for his pharisaical cant, than for all the crimes he had committed, while he led what he cantingly called the life of the "natural man."

It had been understood pretty generally in Lynnesborough, very soon after Mr. Elias Crawford received his anonymous letter, that the prodigal son who had brought himself down to husks and swine was to return to comfort, forgiveness, and the fatted calf, at Briarheath; but it was always known that his wife barely tolerated his presence, though she treated him most considerately, and that she was, indeed, only such after his desertion in name.

There were not wanting many of her own sex to blame her for this course of alienation, necessary as she felt it, for the good of her own soul, and among others, Sophia Sutton was hard upon her, and profuse if not loud in insinuations.

"It is an old adage that a good wife makes a good husband," she would say, with her most viperish expression. "I leave people to draw their own inferences. I will say this for Julius Howard: there was not a more genteel young man, nor a better dressed in all Lynnesborough, when the two were married. But these scribbling women never keep comfortable homes, at least, for their own husbands, who, of course, require all of their

time, and are entitled to it. I have heard it whispered that sister Hester, *just* to show herself off, went on the stage at one time in California, and that it was all he could do to get her to leave it."

This had just been confided in deep secrecy by Melissa, who stole the information, as she alleged, from Mattie, in one of her somnambule trances. But we shall soon know better!

"Well, well! When will wonders cease?" said Mrs. Crawford, her hearer on one of these occasions, holding up her hands in holy horror. "Do tell!" (she was a Connecticut sister, and still clung to her peculiar provincialisms.) "Are you sure of this? for if you are, *that* accounts for her never having been to hear Mr. Crawford preach, and she used to be so devoted to his teachings," with a heavy sigh. "Poor, dear lamb; was it thus she fell from grace? An actress, indeed!"

"I didn't know before she ever had any," said Sophia, gruffly. "If you could only have heard my poor, dear mother tell of the trouble she had with that child, it would have made you open your eyes wider than ever."

"Indeed!" said the already round-eyed, yet gentle gossip, thus addressed, stretching her dull, projecting orbs to the utmost.

"She even refused to sleep in the room with aunt Angelina, as she began to grow up, who was so offended that she left the house, and went to board at Deacon Freeman's, where she married Jerry Starke, so that we lost every cent of her money."

"I suppose it was cheaper," said the practical Mrs. Crawford, "and a very good move she made, as it turned out, for Jerry Starke was a well-to-do hatter, and she thrived and prospered."

"No such thing; (cheaper, indeed! when she only paid what she chose at Briarheath!) No, it was that child's temper, I tell you, that took her to the garret in the cold, rather than inhabit a room with aunt Angelina, who had scolded her about spoiling her patch-work quilt it seems that she had set her to help make for the missionary society. That was the whole gist of the matter, and she sulked a month before she made the move (hoping to get the spare room), which she did suddenly, at last, when we were away from home."

"She was a shy child, I remember, always," said Mrs. Crawford, compassionately. "Maybe it was *that*."

"Shy! after all her advances to Julius Howard? Why, he never would have looked at her if she had not thrown herself at his head in the way she did; that stands to reason, Mrs. Crawford. An elegant man like him, indeed! and just look at him now!"

"Yes, yes, it is very mournful to be sure; but that wasn't the way people looked at the matter, Sophy—Mrs. Sutton, I mean—I heered your honored mar much blamed for her part in the affair (I am sorry to tell you this, but truth will out), and the day that child was married they tell me she looked as if she was attending her own funeral.

"We had every reason to expect from your mar's position in our church that my husband would *preform* the ceremonial; but she knuckled to Howard, and they had the Episcopal to jine them, and we always thought hard of your mar in consequence (just a leetle bit hard). But poor Hester was not to blame, and as far as I can see, she is a mighty gentle, kindly-spoken creeter yet. But of course she hadn't ought to have kept her hus-

band's existence a secret from the hull congregation, as she did."

"No, indeed, that she oughtn't. It was a matter she was in duty bound to have proclaimed from the house-tops, rather than to have involved poor Melissa and Mulgrave in such trouble."

"Dear me! you don't say."

And again the pious and appealing hands were raised to heaven; this time in consternation, so that the kitten had time to tangle the knitting-work inextricably before it was recovered, that had rolled from the knee of the minister's second wife, during her paroxysm of surprise.

"I only wonder," continued Sophia, monotonously, "that either Mattie or Melissa ever went near her again, after all she did towards marring their prospects for life. I had the account from Melissa's own truthful lips; for you know, Mrs. Crawford, that though Mattie would prevaricate a little sometimes, when they were children, Melissa never did."

"Oh, never! she was always truth itself, as far as any one could see. Now I mind of Mattie's telling my husband's grandchildren a pack of fibs about old Doctor Patterson's cane, and skeering of 'em almost to death. One time she said as how it was a snake and crawled under the bed oncet when she was sick, and wiggled its tail at her, and then came and stood up again stiff and stark when the doctor was ready to go; then again, how it was a money-box full of half eagles, that he unscrewed the ivory knob of every day to put in when his patients paid him, and how you could hear it chink when he walked along the street pavements; then how—"

"Oh, that was mere childish fun, I suppose. She will

have her fling at her doctor, and her preacher, and even at elder Sutton himself sometimes—Mattie will; but she is a very fine woman, for all that; but what I meant to say was that Melissa was not given to—to—”

“Lying?” suggested Mrs. Crawford, eagerly, for she was impatient for the denouement.

“Well, have it your own way, sister Crawford: that will do, certainly; it's broad enough anyway, even for a Yankee school-marm. Melissa, who is not given to ‘lying’ then, informed me confidentially, that her engagement to Mulgrave, and Mattie's to that rich quack doctor that lived in Ilium, when she went to school there, were both broken off by the machinations of their half sister, Mrs. Hester Howard. In other words, by her flirting ways; for between ourselves, and in strict confidence, she engaged herself solemnly to marry both of these men at once, just before Julius Howard returned!”

“Law sakes! you don't tell me so!”

“Yes, I do; but let it go no further. Don't even tell deacon Crawford, and if you *do*, don't give me, I beg, as your authority.”

“Of course not, Sophia; about your sister, too, or rather your mother's husband's first wife's only daughter? Of course not; that would be scandalous. But how did she manage it?”

“Why, by passing herself off as a rich widow, and rolling her eyes at them; that's how. There never was a man yet that could stand against eye-rolling, and you know how she lifts hers suddenly and lets them drop again, most all the time.”

“Yes, I know what you mean; Melissa has got to doing of hern that way, lately.”

"Melissa, indeed! Yes, I believe she does try and imitate some of her Lynne sister's ways, for all she has given her such a heart-stab."

"That's because of Mrs. Howard's good looks, you know. Now you must confess, Sophia, she is a mighty well-favored, pretty-spoken creatur, for all them deceitful ways you tell me of; and husband says she only wants grace to make her—"

"Graceful, I suppose," interpolated Sophia Sutton, with a bitter sneer. "I believe my elder holds the same opinion; but I have always noticed pious men prefer worldly women."

The gum-elastic cord of my story must now be suffered to fly back from the strain on which I have held it to its proper space, and attach itself to Hester as she sat musing beside the hearthstone, on that dreary November evening that brought her a revelation.

By the gray light that still made it possible to read the letter James Sellers silently placed in her hand, and standing close against the window-panes to catch the last gleam of day upon its surface, she commenced its perusal; but long before she reached the conclusion of the first page, Hester Howard staggered forth, letter in hand, from behind the friendly curtains that had so far concealed her, to throw herself in a chair and feel for a time as though the sudden hand of death was laid upon her. Moments passed unheeded, while this condition of things lasted; from which at last she rallied, with an effort like one makes in throwing off a nightmare.

The lamp had been lit in the interval, and Mr. Howard sat at the library table busily engaged in reading a letter—hers she saw at a glance. During her seizure,

it had fluttered to the floor; and coming in softly he had secured it, supposing her to be asleep.

She arose and went forward now.

"The letter is mine," she said; "Mr. Howard, be good enough to restore it to me. There exists no longer any community of this sort between us."

"Oh! I didn't suppose it was a secret you had treated so carelessly, for I found it on the floor; but what in the world is it all about? for I can't make head or tail of it, and its references. Who wrote it, anyhow, Hester?" handing it to her carelessly as he spoke.

She received and folded it before replying; then crushing it in her hand, while she bent upon him eyes of grave displeasure that made strange contrast with her sad and stricken face, she answered him calmly:

"The gentleman I should have married, had you not returned. The man I *love*; who, through you and your duplicity, is lost to me forever."

So saying, she was gone.

CHAPTER II.

HOWARD'S SOLILOQUY AND COMPARISON—LORA'S PROPHECY—THE SEA GIVES UP ITS DEAD.

"WELL, if that isn't enough to take the starch out of a man, I don't know what is," soliloquized Mr. Howard, as he twisted off a bit of tobacco and crammed it in his small and box-like mouth, a feature that possessed neither elasticity nor expression.

"I thought it was Mulgrave, up to this minute, that was her admirer—always honorably, of course—and here crops out another, waiting for my shoes. Well, let 'em wait—both of 'em. They will be well worn before they get 'em, that's a comfort; for Doctor Patterson says 'people of a gouty diathesis live forever,' when they regulate their habits, as I am doing mine at last. And I've got a leetle too much sense," screwing up one eye knowingly, "if I know myself, to cut loose again, after all I have experienced. I suppose she and the man who writes to her in enigmas like a *spynx*, would be highly delighted if I would cut up again, or peg out altogether; but as long as I can keep down to a certain decent level, Mulgrave says I 'have her on the hip.' Those were his words. He saw she didn't fancy *him*, I suppose, and so brought me here to keep off t'other."

Again, alone in her room, Hester Howard opened and read her letter of farewell.

What was there in those brief and icebound lines to bring back to her cheek, her lip, after their first pallor of surprise was over, the color born of emotion that flickered in her face like a newly-lit altar flame?

Why did she feel her heart tremble and glow after reaction had occurred, as it had not done since the conviction seized her that her letter had been slighted?

The certainty that he had never received her communication wrought this change—the joy of unshaken faith and confidence restored. The fault was not in him, that was plain, and this was enough to make her careless of all other short-comings, whether on the part of friend or foe.

She had gone personally to the postmaster, when her

suspicious had been at first aroused as to the fate of her letter, to inquire concerning it, and referring to his books he had found that such a package had been sent to Ilium on the day she named—a weighty package he remembered, sealed with a big L, and properly directed, of course, and with this assurance she had rested satisfied.

She could bear it all better now, she felt; now that she knew *he* loved her—loved her, to exile, to despair—and that her silence “had worked like madness on his brain.”

But how to repair these evils? She wrote to Doctor Bellair (for it was due to both that matters should be explained), *who* had charge of his affairs, asking for the address of Mordaunt Trevor. The first letters, he said, were to be addressed to Beyrout, and to that point she directed a simple note, as short and almost as guarded and concise as his own.

He read it a month later sitting on a fallen cedar-tree of Lebanon, on the hill that overhangs the village of Symar, where he was then abiding; read it and found to be true, what he ought never to have doubted for a moment, that she, who had so suffered through his apparent negligence, had been misconceived by him, and fatally duped by others.

She told him of her voluminous letter, and the pains she had taken to secure its safe transmission, and of the representations which had induced her to consent to receive her delinquent husband, said to be dying at the time by his physician (she never knew that Howard had anticipated her reply, for fear of a refusal, nor by whose advice); nor did she conceal from Doctor Trevor how

purely this had been with her a matter of duty. The note was very plain and even practical, for she deemed it just to aid her lover in the sore struggle he must make in order to break the ties that might otherwise prove chains about his feet, in the lonely path he was treading. She was not one to fan the flame of romance at the expense of principle, nor to gild immorality with the name of love. Yet, had all the poetry of her nature been poured into this letter, it could not have so strengthened the bond it sought to break.

It is an idiosyncrasy, perhaps, to "take on" love in this enduring fashion, one that it is fortunate for mankind prevails not more generally, else would affection most often perpetuate despair. It was a little singular that these persons, so unlike in most respects, should unite in this one quality, and both preserve unalterably the power of resisting all future approaches of passion, through the force of this inoculation.

The note that Doctor Trevor wrote in reply to that which filled his innermost soul with joy was full of repressed tenderness, and yet cold and grave enough to have convinced its recipient of his deep respect for the position she had again *assumed*, for had not the cage-door once been set wide open? and here the correspondence ended; she wrote no more.

Between Mr. Howard and his wife the subject of the letter and its writer was never again mentioned; but he took good care to interfere no further with her correspondence, about which he did not really care a fig. The time for such domineering, he knew, was over; yet he was as we have seen an adept in the Japanese art of torturing within the limits set by self-preservation, and

he still took advantage of his privilege to annoy in every possible way the woman who was once more partly in his power, and in full reach of his claws.

He had graduated as perfectly in the science of acupuncture as does the Chinese student of medicine, who, we are told, is obliged through a covering of thick linen to thrust his needle unerringly into either of the three hundred and ninety-nine pin-holes representing nerves, in the effigy before him, as directed by his examining professor, before he receives his diploma. Howard had richly earned his by the proficiency he displayed in this process of accurate acupuncture, as regarded Hester's peculiarities, which he knew by heart.

Still, as has been said, he understood that he must keep within certain bounds, now that he lived in his wife's house, not his own, and was supported by her bounty, and partly by her brain-labor, for in spite of retrenchment in every other department, Mr. Howard's maintenance, with all the dainty requisitions it involved, made a large addition to the expenses of Briarheath, and necessitated exertion on the part of its mistress.

The rooms she had fitted up for Mrs. Carisbrook had never been entered by Hester Howard since the fatal day on which her eye had caught the name of her friend in the list of the passengers on the "Mount Hecla." They had since then been sealed up in sepulchral gloom; nor was it until November came—that much belied month which in our Middle States keeps far more days of festival than mourning—that she summoned courage to enter them again.

Once more the soft sunshine rested on the rich carpet on which the packages of books were still reposing that

had been destined to fill that book-case, with its panelled doors still standing open, painted by no unskilful hand with scenes from the comedy of "As you like it," and surmounted by a bronze bust of the mighty master himself.

The idea had not then been suggested that seems to be rooting itself so firmly now in some sensational brains, that like the little woman who doubted her own identity when the peddler had shortened her garments, the very existence of Shakespeare, as a creator, was liable to dispute and even doubt. To the people of that day it did not seem so improbable as it does to those of ours, that one and the same influence bearing on an age of transition might produce twin majesties of genius and of intellect, and Shakespeare was not then confounded with his antipodes.

During this period of nature's gorgeous carnival, as I have said, it occurred to Hester Howard to enter those sealed rooms and give them a glimpse of the balmy air and radiant sunshine of the outer world.

She was strengthened in this task, one that she knew must be undertaken sooner or later, by her late letter from Doctor Trevor, and the renewed certainty she received from its almost frigid lines of his unchanged affection. More courtesy, more warmth might not have so convinced her, under the stringent circumstances of its inditing, of the continuance of his devotion. As it was, she trod on air for a few days after that letter reached her hand, and her returning energies bore her to face at once the shock that awaited her, as she well knew it would do, on her first entrance into those now ghostly apartments.

She went alone, key in hand, to open them unwittingly, intending to permit Lora, later, to wipe away all encumbrances of dust and damp which might have accumulated on the walls or furniture during their interval of strict seclusion from outward access. But when she had thrown open the eastern window, and the sunshine flooded the floors, on that regal autumn morning, the deserted chambers seemed sadder to her than before, and she felt that she had overrated her own strength.

They were certainly beautiful apartments, and perfect in every accessory of taste and comfort, from the carpet beneath the feet to the paper on the walls, and the furniture that surrounded these. All was in keeping, even to the draperies of windows and bed.

It was there she had been standing, before those very shelves, she remembered well, when Myra Clay brought her the evening paper, and something beyond herself (for she was rarely impatient about the news of the day) led her to open and read the first conspicuous notice that met her eye.

Why the child had brought it to her at all was something strange in itself, for James Sellers usually deposited her mail bag on the library table, unopened. "She was coming at any rate to help her mistress arrange the books," the little girl had said, in explanation, and finding this paper lying on the hall table had carried it mechanically in her hand to Mrs. Howard, along with the feather brush and dusting cloth she held.

Then, after glancing at its first page of contents, Mrs. Howard had walked steadily, paper in hand, across the hall to her own room, so Myra had reported, without uttering a word, but with a ghastly face, and "the long illness" commenced from that hour.

Later, Lora had closed and darkened the fatal chambers by order of her mistress, and laid aside the key, which now for the first time since that sad day of September was again demanded, and inserted in the lock of the tabooed apartment.

"Dat sperit 'll walk dar if my mistis keeps dem rooms shet up much longer," mumbled old Lora once to Myra Clay, when the house-cleaning fever was on her in full force, and she longed to have access to the mysterious rooms consigned to dust and silence.

"Our school-teacher says there's no such thing as ghosts," said Myra, pragmatically, "and that spirits go to their appointed places and never trouble people of this world any more."

"An' does you belebe dat foolishness, chil' alive? Wat does Yankee school marms know about sperits anyway? Dey is beyond deir conformation, I tells you, Myra Clay, an' Miss 'Nisbie Spratt had better stick to her readin' an' writin, an' copyin' books, an' let speritual things alone; case it takes dem wat has ghosly privileges to understan' de ways ob dem spooks, wat has no res', chile, tell de drefful day of judgment," and she waved her broom impressively in the air, "no res' for de soles ob deir feet, and no cover fu de crowns ob deir heads, 'specially dem as is drowned in deep waters, as I have always heern tell, and dey looks about to fin' some lonesome place, like dem rooms ober dar, whar dey can be quiet like, and repose deir selves in peace an' consolation.

"I tells you wat, Myra Clay, it won't be tree weeks afore we hears news of Madam Carisbrook ober in dem solitacious chambers, ef my mistis doesn't let in de light ob de hebbens an' have 'em well cleaned an' dusted."

"Dear, dear!" said Myra Clay, quaintly, "I wonder what makes ghosts so fond of dirt and darkness, especially when they were nice ladies and gentlemen before they died. How they must change!"

"Ob course dey is changed, chile; ob course dey is," not observing Myra's twinkling eyes. "My ole man tetched one ob 'em one night, wat started up right afore him, on de cross-roads near Rollin'-fork mills; an' he said it felt jus' like blanco-mang-è, or dis here quiberin' calf's-foot jelly wat had been sot in de 'frigerator to git cole. Wy dey has no blood nor bones, chile, only frog-flesh; an' dey soon fines out whar dey can be quiet an' alone; for dey does dispise cheerful company—dem spooks does—an' light an' fire an' fixins."

"Just here I was standing," mused Hester Howard, "when the list of passengers—the list of the lost, for *all* were lost, save the captain and the cabin-boy—met my eye; the two extremes of the line of social compact that bound those unfortunates together, for a time, in a separate world. Gone, forever! she who was to me friend, mother, teacher, example, all in one. Oh, had she been spared to sustain me, I feel that I should have better borne this last terrible ordeal; but it is killing me, and there is no one to stretch forth a saving hand. My God! if a miracle like this be required to make me recognize, as I desire to do, thy presence, thy affection, restore to me at least the spirit of my friend."

Oh! wild, wild words! and she felt them so in the next moment; for, bursting into tears, Hester sank into a deep chair, near which she was standing, and, covering her face with her hands, prayed for peace, for forgiveness, for submission.

"Not until the end of all, shall we two meet," she thought, still sitting there with closed eyes and hand-supported brow. "Let me try and believe, that it may be her gracious mission then, as I cross the portals of the grave, to lead to me my children—my little Blanche and Gilbert—lovely as when the fatal fever seized them, angels now; for surely God could grant me no greater atonement than such reception in heaven, for all that I have suffered here. Those words again! Alas! of all his creatures, I am, I fear, the most thankless and rebellious. I deserve to be crushed to the dust."

The moments sped, and the time for Lora's coming fast approached. The half hour had nearly expired, when the door opened and closed so softly, that wrapt away in revery, it passed unnoted by Mrs. Howard.

Then she heard a low, clear, familiar voice calling her name, "Hester, Hester"—softly, as if fearing to disturb her, and looking up, Mrs. Carisbrook stood before her, though still at the other extremity of the room—Mrs. Carisbrook, paler, thinner, more spiritual-looking than she had ever seen her, yet clad in her earthly habiliments.

Did she dream, or was she mad, or had God indeed performed a miracle for her sake, to shake her unbelief?

She rose, and stood with dilated and staring eyes fixed on the form before her (now steadily advancing with outstretched arms)—stood, with one hand introverted into space, the other pressed upon her brow, the very image of amazement, terror and incredulous joy.

It was not until she felt herself pressed to a warm, palpitating human breast, that she recognized the truth clearly; but the shock had overpowered her, and she sank fainting in the arms of her friend.

Lora came, only waiting without as she was to be summoned, and having been restrained by Mr. Howard with difficulty from announcing the arrival of Mrs. Carisbrook to her mistress, which he assured her she knew all about already.

He had forgotten, he declared afterwards, and perhaps with truth (let us give him the benefit of the doubt, at least), that he had never delivered "Manager Morton's message to his wife confided to him in New York, on his way to the cars, the very day he set out to return to Lynnesborough, and so had nearly destroyed Hester, as at first it seemed."

"It was very inconsiderate, certainly," observed Mrs. Carisbrook, who sat by the bedside of her friend, watching new light returning to the soft, violet eyes, and feeling the hand she held close ever and anon on hers convulsively.

"You might have thrown her back into that old, miserable condition we all remember, by such a want of foresight," said Doctor Clarke, who had accompanied the "*mutual*" friend for a visit of a few days from New York (where he found himself on a visit to his daughter), to renew his old acquaintance, and prove his attachment to his dear California patient.

The change in Mrs. Carisbrook's appearance was accounted for by her narrative of events; for it appeared that, after taking her passage and even paying for her ticket on the "Mount Hecla," she was suddenly stricken with malignant erysipelas on the very day on which the vessel sailed, and was obliged to delay her voyage.

Her malady had progressed so rapidly that she could not write, nor even cause to be written, as she desired to

do, a letter to Hester, apprising her of her change of plans, for she was in Liverpool in a hotel, and among entire strangers.

Through her physician she apprised her son in California of her condition, and he had gone to her as soon as possible, and remained with her when her life was despaired of, until her convalescence was established.

Business then recalled him home *via* New York, where he had unfortunately met Mr. Howard, and delivered to him a message he would else have written, and now Mrs. Carisbrook, in compliance with her promise, had come to pass a season with the friend she loved, before proceeding to San Francisco, to make her final home with her only son.

As for Doctor Clarke, he had but a few days to spare, and these he devoted to the health of Mrs. Howard, much to her advantage.

CHAPTER III.

"WELCOME THE COMING; SPEED THE PARTING GUEST"—
MR. STEINBACH SPEAKS HIS MIND TO THE WIRE-PULLER
—A TETE-A-TETE—MULGRAVE VERSUS MELISSA.

MR. MULGRAVE came to Briarheath, in April, partly on business, and partly to see how prospered the work of his own cunning hands. Mrs. Carisbrook was just preparing to depart when he arrived, her intention being to go first to New York, and then by sea to Aspinwall, after having passed a peaceful, pleasant, and useful winter at Briarheath.

On this occasion, Hester had told her everything that had occurred since their last parting, and more than ever did her thoughtful friend deplore her lot, yet commend her conduct of life, and strict adherence to duty.

She had known Eric Mordaunt—the grandfather of Doctor Trevor—and confirmed all that his descendant had alleged of his virtue, attainment, and high-standing, both as clergyman and instructor; but of the parents of Hester's lover she had never heard, nor yet of his own melancholy history, now first imparted to her in strict confidence.

The sympathy that she freely bestowed was balm to the wounded heart of Hester Howard, which had scarcely recovered from the fierce struggle of its dark hours of temptation and after disappointment and sorrow, when Mrs. Carisbrook came to revive and comfort it as though by a miracle of grace.

The religious teachings, and persuasions too, of this newly recovered and dear companion of her earlier years, made now, for the first time, a profound impression on the nature prepared by continuous suffering for such conviction.

She recognized at last the divine mercy that had sustained her through much tribulation, and granted her, one by one, every gift she had solicited, to be withdrawn again through her own weakness, or impetuosity, or absolute unworthiness, she doubted not, and she bowed in deep submission to the will of God.

Through such means, health and cheerfulness were restored to her, and even the interest she had lost in common things, and Mr. Mulgrave found her with the old light in her eye, the tender bloom upon her cheek

that had so charmed him on their first interview in California.

"Mr. Howard's return seems to have acted like magic on his wife," remarked Mr. Mulgrave to Mr. Steinbach, still a constant and ever-welcome visitor at Briarheath, as the two guests found themselves alone after supper in the library, for Mr. Howard was playing a four-handed game of euchre in the dining-room, with Doctor Patterson and the Misses Dean; and Mrs. Howard, on that last evening, was closeted with her friend up-stairs.

"Like magic! I never saw such a favorable change," and he kindled his cigar, as he stood on the rug with his back to the fire, eying the old man seated before him in the deep library chair, interrogatively, as he did so, then tramping out impatiently the match beneath his feet.

"She is well; very well," was the rejoinder. "I think not, however, that the return of Mr. Howard, a man troublesome, excitable, not fit for her at all, is at the root of this physical improvement," and he relapsed into silence.

"What then, Mr. Steinbach—I know your insight into character—hers, especially: what then," and he spoke eagerly, "so tranquillizes, so cheers her mood? Is it—it is it—or do you know—her correspondence?"

"I think not; for I have heard her say, not long ago, a lady she, truthful you know, exceedingly, that beyond her publishers, she has none worthy of the name, and writes and receives few letters. It is that good genius of hers, who leaves to-morrow, I fancy, that has wrought this work; that woman, benign, gentle, strong, intelligent, feeling-full beyond all I have seen in this region; fit for a queen, a ruler, an expounder of the gospel even,

and persuasive and considerate to all around her: it is Mrs. Carisbrook who has built up the strength, mental and physical, of our friend."

"I am truly glad to hear it, truly grateful to her," he said, dryly, "for I am interested in the welfare of Mrs. Howard; but tell me, how did she bear the return of the truant to his harness? Do they work amicably, or is it all deceit and distance, as it used to be?"

"I look not into the affairs," said Mr. Steinbach, "of those who honor me with admission into their households, beyond the mere externes, of which I judge, of course, from my own observation. I confess I saw no change for the better in Mrs. Howard's condition, until the arrival of Madam Carisbrook; indeed I thought her dying rapidly at one time."

"And this was my work," *thought* Mulgrave. "I was afraid of that, almost afraid to come. I wish sometimes I had let her have her own way, for Howard will live forever in his coddled condition, and for all that I have accomplished, *how* am I any the better?"

"It is a great relief to me to find her health improved from any cause, Mr. Steinbach," he *said*, after a pause. "Do you know, by-the-by, whether Miss Mattie is to marry Doctor Trevor? Such was the report."

"Doctor Trevor, Mrs. Howard tells me, sailed for Trieste in October, to return no more, in all probability, to this land; and as to Mattie Lynne, he never thought of her, my good sir, I assure you. He was a falcon that flew at higher game, a noble bird, that ought to have brought down his quarry, but missed it by the turning of a feather," and he gazed fixedly through his glasses at Mulgrave.

"I think I understand you, though your speech is allegorical. You think then he was worthy of our fair and stately swan?"

"None worthier, that the sun shines on; some treachery was there, I feel assured."

"But the return of her mate was enough of itself to put an end to that romance, you know," said Mulgrave, carelessly.

"Who made him to return? I ask you that! Was there no woman's jealousy at work?"

"He is off the track, at any rate," mused Mulgrave, "and suspects Mattie, evidently. Well, let him; she deserves all he can say about her, no doubt. I saw what she was after in the depot parlor, the little wheedling minx. I never was so deceived. No doubt she made mischief then."

"You refer to Melissa, I suppose," said Mulgrave, vaguely. "She did seem a little taken with the doctor, though I always thought he was in love with Mattie."

"Where were your eyes then, Mr. Basil Mulgrave? How could you fail to see what even these bat's eyes saw with pride and pleasure, that those two noble, beauteous, and cultured people of God's especial moulding loved, nay, idolized each other?"

"Your words are strong. Be cautious how you speak thus, old man, for Mrs. Howard's sake."

"I speak to one who understands it all; who saw and used the weak wickedness of Mattie Lynne to destroy this golden dream of innocent happiness," said Mr. Steinbach, resolutely. "A dream which even to contemplate renewed my youth, and which cast its sunshine on my dim and downward way. To no other have I breathed

a suspicion of this sort ; but you know more of this than meets the eye. I have an inner sight that tells me much. There have I seen you mirrored, Basil Mulgrave," and he laid his hand upon his honest breast.

"You insult me, sir ; you are a hoary slanderer."

"Your words are strong, young man ; be cautious how you speak, for Mrs. Howard's sake," and he laughed low ; then drawing out his snuff-box prepared to take the climax of all things to him—a pinch of snuff.

"Were you a younger man I would chastise you, sir, for your insolence," foamed Mulgrave.

"I rejoice, then, for the first time, that I am not young," said the imperturbable German. "You will be sorry, I know, being young yourself, and apologize to-morrow. I can wait."

Strangely enough this prediction, if not demand, was verified, and Melissa entering opportunely in her fresh evening toilet, which set off to advantage her waxen complexion, checked all further effusion for the time on the part of the irate Mulgrave, whom she sedulously humored and flattered for the remainder of the evening.

Soon after her appearance, Mr. Steinbach took his leave, having received through Myra Clay permission to return to breakfast, so as to escort Mrs. Carisbrook to the noon-day cars.

It was during the course of this breakfast, and while Mrs. Howard and her departing guest were signally absorbed in each other, that Mulgrave took occasion to slip a card into the hand of Mr. Steinbach, on which was simply written in pencil, in a sprawling hand, very different from the small compact chirography he usually employed, the conspicuous word "pardon."

Mr. Steinbach was obliged to draw out a pair of glasses before he could read the card which he held before him, and upon which he wrote a brief line in reply, handing it back noticably to Mr. Mulgrave.

"Of course, whenever asked," were the words that met the eye of that chained catamount, in the quaint, foreign hand of the old musician. He rose haughtily and cast it in the fire. He could scarcely keep his hands from the old man's throat as he returned to the table, so keenly did his amused smile irritate his self-love. But a scene in the house of her, who formed for his eyes their only cynosure of delight, was not to be thought of, for still his passion consumed him and made him an abject worshipper at the feet of one who cared for him no more (he recognized this truth at last) than the carpet she trod on; nay, perhaps, not so much!

A very different interview awaited him from that of the preceding evening.

"Come into my sanctum, Mulgrave," said Mr. Howard, after breakfast, and having ascended an easy flight of stairs, they went into "the master's" room together.

"So you lodge here?" said Mulgrave. "By George, you have very comfortable quarters; better off than you were in Paris. Heh, Howard?"

"I don't know that. It is deuced dry at Briarheath, and between ourselves, she keeps me at a magnificent distance. That's one thing I want to talk to you about, professionally. Am I, or am I not, the master of Briarheath?"

"Nominally only, Howard, as it seems; but I'm sure you couldn't wish for better accommodations. These rooms are charming. Just my ideal of bachelor comfort."

"Bachelor? But I'm not a bachelor," bringing down his fist forcibly on the table near him, and making the glasses jingle that had been set there recently by James Sellers. "Now, you brought money, I know, when you came. If I am master here, why wasn't it handed to me? She gave me only what she chose of it."

"But you are well taken care of, fed and clothed and supported. What more do you want?" asked Mulgrave, coarsely, helping himself to brandy and water as he spoke.

"To understand my position, sir! and if this place and those funds are mine, to rule the one and handle the other. You told me when I returned that I could carry everything before me, by pretending patience at first; yet I cannot see that I make the least progress."

"And so you can, Howard. I have yet to see the woman who is not glad to be able to shift all business responsibilities on the right shoulders, if capable of assuming them. You have only to convince your wife."

"A more difficult matter than you think, Mr. Mulgrave," interrupted Howard, grimly. "Hester has fixed opinions on all subjects, not to be changed, even by what the whole world says."

"I had thought her, on the contrary, singularly flexible," and he smiled sagaciously.

"Then you made 'von grand mistake,' as the little Frenchman says, and that was all."

"You are looking far better for your regular habits and the good grooming you get here, Howard, than when I saw you in New York. Your florid complexion is returning and your hair getting thick and curly again, after falling off deplorably. How wonderfully you pre-

serve its color, by the way. Look at mine, now," and he lifted his long side-locks: "the gray hairs are legion. You have not one!"

"We men of the sanguine temperament certainly do hold our own better than you bilious individuals," said Howard, conceitedly. "Now I dare say I am older than you are; my age is forty-three, and yet one would suppose—"

"That you were my grandfather," laughed Mulgrave. "No, no, Howard, it won't do! The light reveals a multitude of wrinkles in your face, that I defy it to show in mine, and the sparkle in my eye is still undimmed; while yours—excuse me—is like a drop of dirty dish-water! One can't live the life you have led, old fellow, without paying a price for it, and you ought to be thankful that it is ended by stern necessity even, for Briarheath is settled on your wife; her lands are her own (that is the few she still retains), and what *little* money remains to her shall never, by my consent, reach your clutches. You can claim what she works for, of course; that is one of the shining points of our English law that all men must admire," speaking with bitter irony; "but when you do so you will kill your golden goose for one egg, for she will work no longer for such ends. Now you understand your position fully, Mr. Julius Howard—"

"And you brought me here for this! To put me in limbo and cut me off from every privilege dear to the dignity of manhood. I thank you, Mr. Mulgrave," and he took a drink, sighing profoundly afterwards.

"One thing is certain, if I did not consider it such a deadly sin I would not hesitate to cut my throat. Ah! you may smile, but nothing but the turpitude of the act

prevents my committing it this night, for I am pushed to desperation."

"I can't see how," said Mulgrave, dryly, "nor do I think suicide the crime you do, under certain circumstances. When a man is useless to himself and a bore to every one else (I state an extreme case, you know, just for argument's sake: it is our legal fashion)," and he smiled sardonically, "his suicide ought to be considered a benefit to all concerned."

"But the universal Judge!" said Howard, rolling his eyes to heaven, while his lips quivered and his voice trembled with rage.

"Might, in his charge to the jury," continued Mulgrave, "recommend the prisoner to mercy, and the jurors would let him off with some slight penalty, no doubt, such as cutting off his grog for a thousand years or so, a mere point in eternity."

"Such talk is positively impious," said Howard, shuddering. "I fear you are an unbeliever in revelation, Mr. Mulgrave."

"Well, I don't know exactly what I believe, never thought much about it; haven't had time. I've been struggling for myself, you see, since I was twelve years old, and resting on Sundays, so I rarely got to church; but a bright idea strikes me in your case, Howard. Lynnesborough is a pious place, and if you want to build up a cheap popularity you had better hitch on to old Elias Crawford. He has the stamina, and the will, and the way of drawing sinners out of the mire that would astonish you. Brother Sutton will help to heave your wheels out of the ruts, and if that is not enough, old Hercules, Hubbard Patterson, will lend a hand. Melissa

is a sister, you know, and will assist you to learn the way to paradise; and such a reformation would reinstate you in public opinion, and eventually, whatever you may think, compel your wife's unwilling deference.

"You would have the satisfaction, at any rate, of placing yourself in the right position before the community and becoming the centre of interest, which you are not now by any means. Get this thing through before Mattie comes in August, or she may laugh you out of it, for she is the imp of the family, and has an influence over her sister that you can shake more effectually in this way than any other."

Howard smiled and stirred his toddy, nodding sagaciously as he sipped it with a spoon before tossing it off.

"I'll think about it, Mulgrave, thank you. I suppose you'll stand sponsor at the font for this new-born baby? He—he—he."

"Now don't turn the thing into ridicule, for it's your last chance," said Mulgrave, solemnly, "and if you can succeed in convincing your wife of your earnestness, you're a made man, and will soon be 'the monarch of all you survey,' as the piece says I used to speak in school; the only bit of poetry I remember in the world. It was in the 'Fifth Reader,' I recollect, but I'll be blamed if I don't clean forget the author!"

The subject was dropped here, and an hour later Mr. Mulgrave complained of a headache and went out for a little evening stroll. It was an unusual malady with him, and he thought he must have had a slight chill in the morning, for he was feverish now. At supper time Mrs. Howard remarked two crimson spots on his usually pallid cheeks, and that his eyes were dull and lurid and

his appetite poor, and attributed his condition to his afternoon in the sanctum.

He was her guest for a week on this occasion, by his own announcement, never before having been suffered to spend more than a day or two at her house, when detained by business or stress of weather. "He had a little time now," he said, "and would, if agreeable, devote it to his friends," and again the fair and fluttered Melissa considered him at her feet, and foresaw the blissful day when kneeling on one knee he would request her stumpy white hand to be his gift for life.

There was, after all, a vein of romance in the girl, practical as Mattie thought her, and a womanly capability of self-devotion, which she soon had an opportunity of manifesting.

On the following morning Mr. Mulgrave was very ill, and Doctor Patterson in close attendance. He pronounced his malady an aggravated form of typhoid, if not typhus fever, from the first, and predicted grave consequences. This disease was almost a specialty with him, and he knew perfectly at its onset what to apprehend.

An experienced nurse was at once engaged for the patient, and the whole household held in requisition for his benefit; but above all did Melissa manifest untiring solicitude.

The important task of bathing the face and hands of the fevered patient was assigned to her at her own request (a continuous one menials so often neglect), and she was at her post and his pillow by day and night, gentle, watchful, indefatigable.

She gave him his medicine, too, when he would take

it from no other hand, not even that of Mrs. Howard, and arranged his pillows to suit his restless and burning head with the nice instinct born of true affection.

He watched for her coming as a child does for that of his mother, and in his delirious wanderings called her his "good angel."

Howard, mortally afraid of contagion, never went near the room, and Myra Clay, for the time, was sent to Gertrude Steinbach, to whom she was devotedly attached; but all of the rest of the household went freely in and out, and as it proved, by judicious care, with entire impunity.

The malady pursued its usual tedious course, and the crisis came accompanied with symptoms more than ordinarily alarming, of syncope and coma. Yet still Melissa held her patient and unwearied watch, one she could not be persuaded to relinquish to any other.

And was this the long promised revenge from which the girl, it may be remembered, had promised herself such satisfaction, and was it thus she was to prove herself the Nemesis of Doctor Trevor and Hester Howard?

We shall see: for fate has suddenly placed in her power the honor of the man who so far has scorned her love, and as she persuades herself, played with her finest feelings.

It became necessary, during the long comatose sleep of the patient, to search in his trunk for a further supply of linen, that in the bureau being exhausted, and a sudden exigency arising, from the cold perspiration now bathing every limb, for an entire change of raiment.

"It could not be deferred until morning," the nurse said, "and the laundress had gone home and locked the

laundry, and she knew Mr. Mulgrave possessed a further supply of both linen and flannel shirts, for James Sellers had said so, and would Miss Melissa please to get them out?"

She had a delicacy about handling the patient's keys, for fear of anything being missed and laid to her door, and so far the name of "Nancy Beans was without a blemish, and, the Lord willing, it should remain so to the last," with much more in the same style, while Melissa was on her knees before the Russia leather depository of Mr. Mulgrave's wardrobe.

Shirts there were in abundance, and of all fashions and materials, and a pile of these was quickly laid out for the use of the patient, now, perhaps, already bathed in the fatal death-dew, for none could tell, not the wisest, whither this crisis tended until the morrow, when the sick man would either open his eyes in returning consciousness, or pass to dissolution in a low muttering delirium.

This thought affected Melissa deeply, and she sobbed aloud, as she rose from her knees—keys in hand—not perceiving until she had locked the trunk that a letter had fallen out, or been tossed upon the carpet.

There was no time to replace it now; for the nurse was urgent for her to leave the room, so she went—letter and keys in hand—to her own chamber, resolving to repair her mistake as soon as the patient should be rehabilitated by nurse Beans.

A light was burning low on her toilet-stand, and she threw the letter and keys down carelessly beside it, while she bathed her weary face, and prayed a fervent prayer for the relief of the man she now loved better than ever;

for it is a beautiful order of things that the benefits we confer bind us faster than those we receive to their objects, be the last ever so munificent.

Melissa sat down again by her toilet-stand, and wishing, suddenly, from long habit, to gaze upon her own much appreciated and long-neglected physiognomy, she raised the kerosene lamp, so that the marble slab on which it stood was flooded with sudden radiance.

With a start, she recognized the handwriting of her sister Hester on the superscription of the letter, and raising it, found that it was a bulky package directed to Doctor Mordaunt Trevor, Ilium, New York, and sealed with the famous L cut on onyx, which had been their father's seal, and was hers by bequest.

The letter bore neither stamp nor post-mark, and had evidently been committed to the hands of Mr. Mulgrave for safe delivery.

"She has just written it," she thought. "What can she have to say to Doctor Trevor now? and why direct to Ilium? But perhaps it is a long explanation; for people do say she meant to marry him had Howard never returned. Let me see:

"Here, in another handwriting, is a date—September 21st—a way Mr. Mulgrave has, I suppose, of putting dates outside when he receives commissions, and the envelope is not fresh, the corners are worn, and the seal is faded. I see how it was: she must have given it to his care when he was here in September last, and he, poor fellow, has forgotten to deliver it. I had better carry it at once to sister Hester, I suppose, and let her do with it as she pleases. She might not choose to send it now," and she rose to obey her impulse; but before

she reached the threshold of the door, turned on her steps, and came slowly back again.

"I will keep it," she said, to herself, while a stern shadow flitted over her soft, white face; "keep it until this struggle of life or death is decided—for I would not do him injury, and he is not the man to forget a charge like this. He loved her himself, that was plain to every one, so Mattie thought, even while he made me believe I was the object of his attention, and Mulgrave meant to baffle Trevor by such means. Ah! that is why the doctor never wrote to her. I thought it strange; but I see it all plainly now. He was expecting this package that never reached him, and he went away disheartened. How hard it is, that doom that rests on our whole family! none marry those they love! Even poor Sophy had to put up with Sutton, because Robinson proved faithless. She might have been a better woman had she married happily. As it is! Well, let it pass!"

And locking away the newly-discovered letter in a safe receptacle, she went back with the trunk keys hanging from their tiny ring on her forefinger, to take her place again beside the unconscious sleeper, and revolve all night, as she twirled her keys, the problem of the letter.

Mr. Mulgrave awoke at daybreak, clear of eye and mind, and partook of the arrowroot nurse Nancy had in readiness with the avidity of a hungry child, then dropped again into a calm and natural slumber that continued many hours.

The crisis was over, Doctor Patterson declared when he returned at nine o'clock, and the patient, without a back-set, would recover. A few days later he announced

formally to Mr. Mulgrave that he owed his life chiefly, after God's mercy, to the unfaltering aid Miss Melissa Lynne had given his physician—"a very good fever captain, it is true," said the old man, smiling; and striking down his inevitable cane, he continued: "But what is a captain without a crew, sir, to carry out his orders?"

The sound and wiry constitution of Mulgrave was in his favor; as his convalescence approached.

He recruited rapidly, and Nancy Beans departed with a purse of gold; but Melissa still clung affectionately to her duties, nor did her patient seem so far disposed to dispense with her invaluable services.

"You have been truly kind to me, Melissa," he said, one day, "truly kind—and—ah, sisterly!"

"Yes, kinder than you think, perhaps," was the girl's quiet rejoinder.

"Then, indeed, I rest under insupportable obligations, so to speak, for I know already of enough of your benevolence to burden my whole life."

"To burden it, Mr. Mulgrave?" reproachfully.

"Well, that is not exactly what I mean, after all: but to change the subject; when did you hear from Mattie? and where now is Doctor Trevor?"

"Mattie writes in charming spirits; she has accepted Doctor Bellair and will be married to him in September. He has leased the residence and grounds of Dr. Trevor for an eye infirmary. That is his specialty, you know, and he goes to Europe next month, partly to see Doctor Trevor, whose business he is winding up, and partly to perfect himself as an oculist."

"Indeed, I felicitate Miss Mattie. I suppose it is an

admirable arrangement. I knew Doctor Trevor had left this country, but did not know before that he was in Europe."

"In Asia, then. I don't know where myself, and Doctor Bellair is the only one that does know, I believe. Of course *he* never writes to sister Hester now."

"Of course not; it would be highly improper under existing circumstances."

"And besides, he never received her letter, you know. I think she was wretched about that for a time; but one gets over everything, even death."

"What letter do you allude to?" asked Mulgrave, while the cold perspiration broke visibly over his brow, blanched by recent illness, and he grasped the arm of the chair in which he sat convulsively.

"The letter that tumbled out of your trunk, Mr. Mulgrave, with a pile of shirts, when it became necessary to add to your stock of fresh linen," said Melissa, firmly.

"My God! and what became of that letter?"

"What *should* have become of it, Mr. Mulgrave? The very first thought I had was to carry it straight to sister Hester—and—" she paused.

Nothing could have been more artistic than this pause, though apparently made so carelessly, and she watched the effect exultingly, for grave results were pending on this revelation.

He groaned, he leaned wearily back in his chair, with closed eyes and pallid, parted lips, and Melissa rose officiously to seek the salts.

He waved it gently away, as she held it close to his nostrils, and turned aside his head. She thought for a moment that he was about to faint.

"I fear you have ruined me," he said, gently, "but I deserve it all. I have been *mad*."

"Why should this simple act, so natural under the circumstances, affect you so deeply?" she inquired with interest. "You had evidently forgotten to deliver the letter intrusted to your care last September, and that was all that could or can be said about the matter. You can easily explain it to sister Hester."

"Who told you it was written in September? Did you read it, or did she?"

"Neither the one nor the other, Mr. Mulgrave. The letter is intact. It was dated by you on the outside, I do not understand why; and as I have not shown it yet to sister Hester, she, of course, has not explained it to me."

"She has not seen it, then," and an expression of rapture pervaded his so lately languid countenance. "Are you quite sure of this? Did you not tell me a moment since that you had carried it straight to her on finding it?" he asked, eagerly.

"No; I said only that such was my first impulse."

"But you mentioned the subject, perhaps, to some one else, if not to her? Tell me exactly how you have proceeded, Melissa. Let me know what my position is in this house and with its inmates, I entreat you. The oversight, you see, was so unpardonable, or to her would appear so."

"I have never breathed a syllable concerning that letter to any one, I declare to you most solemnly," she replied. "There you have as good as made me swear. What would dear Mr. Crawford say?"

"Admirable girl! What discretion, what foresight

you have evinced!" and he gazed at her admiringly, taking her hand in his. "Lose no time, my dearest Melissa, in bringing me back that letter. The omission must be repaired at once. Yes, this very evening."

"What do you wish to do with it, Mr. Mulgrave?" she asked, in a low, decided voice, that filled him with dismay, he scarce knew why.

"To—to—send it—to—Trevor as soon as possible," he faltered forth; "I will obtain his address."

"That might not be the proper course to pursue," she said, firmly; "we must first consult sister Hester; she felt herself free when she wrote that letter. She is fettered now, hand and foot, perhaps, by this very oversight of yours, Mr. Mulgrave."

"I will destroy it, then, before your eyes—put it in that fire, and thus be done with it forever."

"You cannot so throw off a grave responsibility," she said, with dignity, for she knew she had him in her power; "nor can I see why you hesitate to restore it to sister Hester; for the seal was never broken. This alone would bear testimony to your honor."

"Melissa, I cannot explain to you why it is so essential to my happiness, that the existence of this unhappy letter should never be revealed to your sister Hester; but if—" he hesitated, then suddenly blurted forth, "if you love me as I think you do, you will question no further my right to its possession. Bring it to me, forthwith, my dearest—" and leaning forward, he kissed her cheek.

Then Melissa rose, and turning upon him her cold yet tearful face, she said—

"Not until you make to me such reparation as you

can make alone, for all my bitter suffering at your hands ; my mocked affection made sport of, even before servants, my weary months of mortification, after your return from Europe, when before my very eyes you shamelessly betrayed your love for a married woman ; for even then you knew her to be such, though we were ignorant of it then and long after. Not until this reparation is made, before man and God, shall you repossess the letter you turned from its rightful channel—*how*, I shall still discover.

"There !" she added, sternly, "you have my alternative. Let me have yours before the close of another day ; for so long, and no longer, will I detain this letter from its writer, and no doubt proper owner—even in the eyes of the law. Then she can do with it as she chooses.

"This is the price of my secrecy, Mr. Mulgrave ; but not until I find myself beyond the gibes and sneers of society, shall I relinquish my hold on this package, and your fidelity ; for I do not intend that the word *flirted* shall be any longer appended to my name—as I know it is now.

"Everything rests with you. My pride, I assure you, is far more concerned than my affection, though I *have* loved you, I confess, as I never loved before. I have saved your life, Doctor Patterson says ; but that, of course, was only a Christian duty. Don't think of that for a moment, nor take into consideration my bitter trials, endured through you, Mr. Mulgrave. Think only of your own welfare ; and when you have made up your mind, please drop me a line."

She left him quite confounded.

BOOK EIGHTH.



Mad for thy love ?

My lord, I do not know,
But truly I do fear so.—SHAKESPEARE.

I do know the man,
A Magian of great power and fearful skill.—BYRON.

The rest thou knowest. Lo, we two are here
We have survived a ruin wide and deep.
Strange thoughts are mine ; I cannot grieve nor fear,
Sitting with thee upon this lonely steep,
I smile, though human love should make me weep.
We have survived a joy that knows no sorrow,
And I do feel a mighty calmness creep
Over my heart, which can no longer borrow
Its trust from chance or change, dark children of
the morrow.—REVOLT OF ISLAM.

BOOK EIGHTH.

CHAPTER I.

MELISSA STEALS A MARCH—MR. HOWARD IS BORN AGAIN—
MATTIE'S MANŒUVRES.

VERY soon after the convalescence of Mr. Mulgrave, the bans were read in the meeting-house of Rev. Elias Crawford, between that worthy and Melissa Lynne; and in the month of June they were married.

Mattie came home to the wedding and brought with her Parthenia Forbes, and in their train came Henry Sinclair, a rising young litterateur well known in Illinois. Miss McClane was obliged to decline her invitation on account of her classes; and Doctor Bellair had already gone abroad.

After the wedding-breakfast the newly married couple departed for their home in Illinois, where, for the present, we will leave them in the enjoyment of what wedded bliss was their portion. It may be as well to state that the unopened package, sealed with the paternal L, was burned by the bride in the presence of the groom an hour after the wedding, and before he could inspect it thoroughly, though he saw very clearly that the seal was intact and the superscription perfect. Some time before this period, however, the contents of the envelope had been skilfully withdrawn through one carefully slit end

thereof, so nicely closed again as to defy superficial examination. Blank paper of precisely the same thickness had been adroitly substituted, and the certainty that he would never dare to break the seal so long superstitiously preserved, had strengthened the determination of the bride to outwit the bridegroom as he had outwitted James Sellers.

Melissa flattered herself that her wish to know the truth concerning the man she was about to marry justified her in this unscrupulous proceeding, and she even felt that she had in some sort, by means of her martyrdom through her sister Hester, acquired a right to penetrate her secrets.

Holding the clew of a mystery of which she supposed even Mr. Mulgrave to be ignorant, she felt her superiority to that incurious person who could so long keep possession of the package which, for some reason, he had evidently intercepted without penetrating its arcana, and she determined on some future occasion, when the matter had lost its edge, to enlighten him as to her discovery and her ingenious mode of making it. What puzzled her was, how to assign the right motives to her husband's honorable forbearance. As to divine displeasure, she did not suppose it could condescend so far, even if to be dreaded.

As Mulgrave had done before, she read on until the pathetic eloquence of the narrative filled her heart to bursting. She became passionately interested in the story of her sister's life, so real yet so simple and sorrowful, so eventless and yet so full of incident.

When she had finished its perusal, a strange and gloomy resolution appeared in her white face and the

eyes shot sparks of that strange livid fire we have described before.

"It shall reach him yet," she said, "the man she loved so deeply and so purely—reach him yet, though I go bareheaded and barefooted to carry it to him; for it is plain to me that these sheets were never confided to the care of Mr. Mulgrave; does she not say distinctly at the last, 'This will go by to-morrow's mail, and I shall take the precaution to have it registered?'"

"He took it from her table, no doubt, or desk, and she never knew what had become of it; or worse, offered to have it mailed and registered for her and neglected to perform his office. Yet, no! she never would have put into his possession the knowledge even, knowing what he did, that she wrote this letter. I know her too well for that, and the register must have told its own story! Never mind! she has been most basely treated, it is plain, by the man, too, I have compelled to be my husband, and I owe both her and Doctor Trevor reparation."

Her venture reached its destination, and was delivered safely to Doctor Trevor in the month of May, by his trusted friend and man of business, Bellair, to whose care, at Ilium, it was directed.

"There has been foul play somewhere," said Doctor Trevor to himself, after reading the dear and welcome story of a life whose purity and seraphic truth were more than ever apparent to him from that hour; "but it will not do to stir Lake Camerina now, for fear of fomenting domestic trouble at Briarheath. Had this reached me in time, what anguish it might have saved us both! as it is, it forms an eternal bond between us."

Then addressing his friend: "Bellair," he said, "if

you have an opinion as to who forwarded this package to me, *hazard none*. Have you mentioned its reception to Mattie?"

"I never thought of such a thing."

"Then promise me that you will never speak of it at all. I ask you this because the information it contains was evidently intended to reach me before I left the United States, and has been fraudulently kept back until now—I think I know by whom—very greatly to my injury and that of another person. That it comes too late has almost broken my heart, but it now becomes important that it should be believed never to have come at all. Without further explanation forget, I pray you, that you ever received or gave it to my hand, and yet I thank you unspeakably for the blessing you have brought me."

Tears stood in the large, clear eyes of Doctor Trevor; tears started to the small, blue, brilliant orbs of young Bellair, for to see a man of marble reticence so moved thrilled his friend's heart through every sensitive fibre.

The old work was going on effectually in Symar. The sick, the afflicted, were being cured and cared for by the philanthropist who shaped his own sorrows into benefits for suffering humanity.

A lovely English lady was under treatment for a disease of the brain, long deemed incurable, and improving daily in Doctor Trevor's hands in mental and physical condition. It was from the account Doctor Bellair gave of her physician's interest in her case, on his return to Ilium, that Mattie managed to get up and write a pretty little romance which caused her sister a few twinges of agony. But these were soon suppressed.

"I could not expect him to live single for my sake," she thought. "I will teach my heart to rejoice in his happiness, let who may be his mate."

And meekly she went about her household ways. She was beginning to feel "the day sufficient for the evil thereof," and to live accordingly.

A great patience had come to be her portion, an indefatigable endurance of the ills she could not avert, a more realistic appreciation than she had felt since her children died, of hourly and daily benefits, such as for years had escaped her attention.

After Mr. Howard was left alone with her, he felt his dependence more than he had ever done on her sweet forethought for his comfort, and forbearance towards his frailties and humors. He was really beginning to try to be a better man, and his temper improved as his self-respect increased, when suddenly Mulgrave and his wife returned, and in some way revived his ideas on the subject of domestic martyrdom.

Melissa was almost fanatical about this time on the subject of proselytism and the doctrine of true baptism, and Doctor Elias Crawford (her frequent visitor) helped her to beset Mr. Howard, as did Elder Sutton, until, contrary to the wish of his wife, untried as he was in the ways of righteousness, he determined to embrace religion, hocus-pocusing, however, for permission as a condition of his proselytism to continue to play back-gammon and ecarte, and drink his daily jorum of brandy and water.

All this was compromised for, on the principle of "snatching a brand from the burning," and thus his wife's influence was entirely neutralized at a time when he needed it more than ever.

This trial, too, she bore with what firmness she might, greatly as she abhorred hypocrisy, the "unpardonable sin" that the Bible tells of, in her opinion. It was amusing and pitiable at the same time to observe the airs of calm superiority Mr. Howard assumed towards her after his sanctification. Among other assumptions he rebuked Mr. Steinbach sternly for playing opera music in his house, and held prayer-meetings in the parlors of evenings, which he compelled his servants to attend, denouncing Catholicism so fiercely, however, that the cook, Kitty Cline, and James Sellers, all gave warning on the same day, and were with difficulty prevailed upon by their mistress to remain, by an offer of extra wages for a season.

The howl of persecution now began against the unbelieving wife, who opposed her husband's conversion, and Mulgrave looked on mischievously, amused at the farce enacted before him.

"How my puppets dance!" he thought; "all but one, whose waxen fingers are moulding me already to her will, for I *fear* that implacable stony face of hers too much to run counter to her wishes, and yet love—like that I once felt—like that which consumes me yet for one who is, and always was, indifferent to me, as to the grass beneath her feet—has no part or parcel with the dull allegiance I accord to her who was my destiny. I, who have pulled the wires so successfully that moved three lives, could not command my own."

"Ask Mr. Howard what he is going to do about his lottery-ticket, now that he has joined the church?" wrote Mattie to Melissa; "the ticket I helped him to select, and which may turn out a prize. Suggest to

him that he had better turn it over to me before it burns his fingers."

"What nonsense!" said Melissa, loftily; for she had taken on great access of dignity as Mrs. Mulgrave. "Of course he would not dare to buy one now as a church member; but this was purchased before he came under jurisdiction, and if it should be successful, I promise Mattie he will be allowed to keep his money. He shall give us a new pool for our chapel, and pocket all the rest."

The history of this lottery-ticket was a little curious, and as it bears no small share in the speedy winding-up of our story, may as well be related here. Mr. Mulgrave had just paid to Mrs. Howard a certain sum of money, a portion of which she turned over to her husband's account through his hands, when Mattie came from Ilium, to attend Melissa's wedding. In the desperation of his feelings at finding himself a mere pensioner on his wife, as he acquainted Mulgrave, Mr. Howard determined to purchase a lottery-ticket, in the hopes that the blind goddess might favor his worthy wish for speedy independence; and understanding that Mattie laid claim to "clairvoyance," he begged that she would dream, or cause him to dream, of a lucky number, or combination of such.

In accordance with this request Mattie sat a whole evening, solemnly gazing into Mr. Howard's fishy eyes, and touching his blunt thumbs with her slender ones; and as both parties were in earnest, the result was a pair of dreams on the same subject.

Mattie and Mr. Howard each had a vision; the one of a flag marked with the figures 1053; the other of a

gridiron with ten bars, for he counted them in his dream, on which a fish was frying.

It was decided by these mystic seers that a ticket should be purchased, if possible, containing the numbers signified by the dream ; and Mr. Mulgrave was fortunate enough, just before he returned to Briarheath, to find the desired combination, with one additional number not supposed to make any essential difference.

This was in August, for the Mulgraves had come expecting to stay to Mattie's wedding at Briarheath ; and finding that she had determined, instead, to be married at Ilium in the church, and go at once to her own establishment (to preside over the very house she had once hoped to share with Doctor Trevor, as the mistress of an "eye infirmary"), they resolved to stay where they were until the time came, and then accompany Mr. and Mrs. Howard, to witness and "assist," as the French say, at the ceremonials.

The lottery would not draw until December, Mr. Mulgrave announced ; so that a long space wherein for anxiety and hope to wrestle lay between Mr. Howard and certainty ; an interval that promised a certain enjoyment to him, through the constant excitement and alternations of elation and despair it must occasion. In the meantime there was much to employ him. He was expected to attend prayer-meetings and love-feasts ; to exhort and be exhorted, and to lay bare his cankered heart to a sympathizing audience who delighted in the details of his wicked experience, as children do in looking at angry sores.

The oft-perverved text, "that there is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repents than a hundred just

men," was sung in his ears, until he considered himself a favored vessel of grace by very reason of his past iniquities; and he was constantly reproaching his wife with the hardness of her heart, her self-sufficiency and her worldly ways, her absence of spiritual grace, and the devil's snares which she was employed in setting.

For thus he characterized those pure and high-toned works of fiction for which her pen was already celebrated, yet not her name.

This was concealed as far as possible by her "nom de plume," "Myrtis," or left in the background altogether, as a secondary consideration.

"All because she is my wife," said Mr. Howard one day in close conversation with Mulgrave. "If she belonged to that infernal Englishman, it would be 'Mrs. Mordaunt Trevor' at the head or foot of every story. I believe it was the name that took her fancy as much as the man. What sort of a looking fellow was he, anyhow, Mulgrave? Good, bad or indifferent?"

"Only so-so," was the careless reply. "That quack doctor, I suppose you mean, that cured her in California. You ought to remember him."

"Was *that* the man? Why, you astonish me! They had been in correspondence ever since, I suppose," eagerly.

"No, I imagine not; he had no idea, until he came here to see Mattie, who her sister was. You see, he was addressing the girl when she left Ilium, and followed her to Lynnesborough by appointment; but the little soul was off to Niagara with Melissa when he arrived, and the madam lay ill with a sort of cataleptic attack (Doctor Patterson thought), caused by the news of Mrs.

Carisbrook's loss at sea. So the sleep-doctor turned in and cured her, gave Mattie the go-by, and, thinking you were dead, popped the question. That's all there was about it, I believe. She refused him, of course; but there was the devil to pay between her and Mattie."

"Ah! hah! I suppose so; but I never heard the details before. You don't think she would have had him, do you, if I *had* been dead?"

"Why, certainly not! A man of his profession, or rather, without any profession at all!—who ever told you such a thing, or insinuated it?"

"I had it from very good authority," said Howard, dryly; "but I didn't believe it at the time. It was only said to rile me, I think; I always thought it was *you*, Mulgrave, that she would have favored; but she was just match-making, it seems, all the time, for Melissa."

At this malicious sally Mr. Mulgrave turned white about the gills, always a sign with him of intense emotion; but he continued silent, quietly puffing his cigar.

"The wretch is taking his revenge, I suppose," thought Mulgrave, "for if he has eyes, he sees how I hate Melissa, and how I worship *her*! Why couldn't we exchange? Oh, if such a thing could be, life would be too precious; as it is, I value it no more than chaff."

"Mr. Mulgrave, I am ready to go," said Melissa, looking in just then, "and the Sliding Stone cars wait, I believe, for nobody. Throw away your cigar and come right away. Here are your hat and gloves—I brought them down-stairs with me, and your shawl, too: it may be cool this evening coming home, and your lungs I find are delicate. Why where is that clean handkerchief I

gave you this morning? Can't find it? Well, I never, such carelessness! Fortunately here is another. I wish to goodness you were as particular as—as Mr. Howard,” for want of a better comparison, and she tripped away insipid and self-complacent as ever, followed by the wretch she had entrapped, and now governed with a rod, not of iron, but of equally inflexible if more elastic gutta percha.

Yet by degrees he learned, let it be said at once, to bear his cross, and was altogether too manly a man ever to be cross with or cruel towards a woman. Indeed, when little children climbed his knees, and he saw what a good mother she made, he grew tolerant of his Melissa.

But dark struggles lay between this time and that. The trials of Doctor Bellair with Mattie were destined to be greatly harder than those of his brother-in-law, in one regard, for he was deeply in love with Mattie, who did not, when they were married, care a straw for him, and who, in the beginning of their wedded life, was extravagant and a flirt, the last in a moderate and proper way. He learned, too, by degrees, that she was unscrupulous and not always truthful, selfish, and a little revengeful, and yet he idolized the piece of piquant perversity who had captivated him so far back as the era of Doctor Trevor's “*déjeuner à la fourchette*.”

Yet the young doctor and his bride were a very happy-looking and stylish pair, if not entitled to be enrolled among the beautiful of the earth, on that fine September morning when the whole élite of Ilium poured into the Episcopal church to witness their nuptials.

The bishop in his pontificals performed the “august” ceremony, as it was reported in the papers, and six

bridesmaids stood flower-like beside the bride, and six groomsmen cowered crow-like beside the groom, and the church was adorned with flowers and waxen lights, though it was in the day-time, and the great organ thundered forth a sacred piece from the favorite opera of Norma, and Miss McClane and Parthenia Forbes trembled and cried, and Madame Barette laughed and remonstrated in her queer way, clasping her fat hands, on the folly of weeping at weddings, "vich every one do love zo much to zee," and Melissa pinched Mulgrave, and asked him whether her lace point was straight or crooked behind, and made him fix it; and Hester Howard, leaning on her husband's arm, was borne back to the day of her own marriage, and remembered the strange transfiguration that seemed to lift her away from the little white-washed church and its surroundings, and wondered how Mattie felt; and how, having once loved Trevor, she could "decline" upon Bellair!

"Who is that beautiful woman?" asked Miss Jarvis of Miss McClane. "You know all those people; the one standing near the bride, I mean, dressed in lavender-colored silk, with white lace shawl and bonnet? One of the relations, I suppose."

"That is Mrs. Hester Howard, the sister of the bride. Is she not truly lovely?"

"She is different from anything I ever saw before. What is she made of—wax, marble or alabaster? and where did she get those eyes?"

"From a hyacinth bed, I suppose, in full bloom," replied young Captain Dale. "I fancy they must smell sweet, they are of such a heavenly purple!"

"She can't live, she is too exquisite; such people

never do," resumed Miss Jarvis. "Professor Jau Jeune! come here this minute. You are good at comparisons; what does that woman look like?"

"A white phalanæ, with violet dots upon its wings; or a—"

"You dreadful man! you never lose sight of those monsters you so adore. Why I am wildly in love with her myself, woman that I am."

"And so is somebody else that I wot of," thought Miss McClane, and it pleased her well to see how that sweet face shone star-like over the multitude for his sake.

"I had no idea that sister Hester was half so pretty, until I saw her in church to-day," said Melissa, pensively, to Mulgrave, as they sauntered from the carriage up to the house of Doctor Bellair, set open for the reception of his bridal guests. "Dress does everything for her. Now, I, you know, am the same always; the only woman, Mr. Clermont says (*the* celebrated portrait painter), he has seen in America who could bear the morning's sun without showing a blemish of complexion. Sister Hester, even, could not stand *that* light, could she?"

"No; I doubt if she could," answered Mulgrave, absently, sick to the very heart, as he felt that day, in the face of such comparison as he himself had made. "Don't linger, Melissa," as she stopped to examine a rare plant; "we are late at any rate;" adding, peevishly, "you move so sluggishly."

And they ascended the granite steps and entered the wide square hall, paved with marble and surrounded with orange trees, and went thence, admiringly, into the drawing and collation rooms by turn, furnished just as

Doctor Trevor had left them, for he confided everything to Bellair, except a certain set of Dresden china and his crested plate and brocaded damask table of napery, small yet valued portions of his heritage.

"It was very mean of him," thought Mattie, "not to send me the keys of his linen and silver chests, when he knew I was to marry Bellair. Thank goodness, he'll never get sister Hester *now*, that's one comfort. What an ugly fellow Bellair is, to be sure, in comparison," and she sighed, "with my Raphael."

There came a time when Mattie thought her Bellair almost handsome, homely as he appeared to her now; but that was so far off in the dim future that Mattie herself, before that hour, had undergone a change almost equal to metempsychosis. She is fifteen years older to-day than she was then, and much improved by associating intimately with a man whose honor and patience and attainments only equal his domestic affections, for he still considered his wife unapproachably attractive, and is as much the lover as on his marriage-day.

Happy Mattie! whose marriage lines have been cast in pleasant places, as they often are with persons of your type—selfish, volatile, and careless of the feelings of others! Nobler souls have most frequently sadder and harsher experiences; and here comes in the great law of compensation, which we will not stop to discuss.

Very soon after these wedding festivities, the two sober couples from Lynnesborough returned in company to Briarheath, where it was understood Melissa was to continue to reside until Mr. Mulgrave could wind up his business, and fix on a more pleasant residence than Queensbury, Illinois, where Melissa declared "all the

men talked through their noses and carried silk pocket-handkerchiefs, and walked tip-toe when in society, like waiters at a first-class hotel, and where all the women dressed like dowdies or dolls, and squeaked like marionettes, and where babies were carried under cotton umbrellas to concerts and public speakings."

Objections like these were, of course, insuperable, and Mulgrave himself was glad of an excuse to escape from uncongenial surroundings; though he had never known before exactly how to break loose from the place where alone he was of consequence, and recognized as an institution.

He had no political aspirations, and just then would have gone to the end of the world to find a change of some kind and get away, not only from Melissa, but himself and his reflections.

"She could have put me in the penitentiary," he thought, gloomily, sometimes; "and she knows it! Thank heaven every trace of that only felony of my life is obliterated; for whenever I have read letters before of other people's, I have sealed them up again, and sent them off to their owners. One *must* do such things sometimes in the way of our business. I don't believe I'll ever repeat even that, however. It seems to me now *so small!*"

During Mulgrave's absence, Melissa and Mr. Howard held many pleasing prayer-meetings, where one could count the attendants by numbering the turned-up soles of the feet on entering the apartment, and where a spirit of persecution, rather than of charity, was openly inculcated.

One night, kneeling thus, Howard caught himself

praying aloud, in the enthusiasm of the moment, that his lottery-ticket might be successful, and that he might draw the great prize he had ventured for, and this little outburst (the most genuine thing he ever uttered in the tabernacle) was set down as metaphorical by those who did not know the truth! He was supposed, of course, to allude to his own salvation, though in figurative terms.

Alas! when December came, it was found necessary to defer the drawing of that particular lottery, on which Howard had staked his money and his faith, and in whose cause he had put up the only heartfelt prayer that ever left his lips, for six months more, and again he was a prey to doubt, hope, expectation, and irritating uncertainty.

He could no longer conscientiously embark in the purchase of lottery-tickets in the face of his religious professions, or he would gladly have done so; nor concert measures whereby to secure them secretly without the chance of being betrayed, and he was now "pious or nothing;" this he knew, and Mulgrave had spoken wisely!

Therefore did he all the more cherish the darling dream of the luck of his lottery-numbers, for there was something awful to him in the remembrance of that night when Mattie Lynne's black orbs seemed to grow into enormous jetty stars before him, and then contract like serpent's eyes, until he believed in the power of witchcraft!

Better for him had it been, far better, that the lottery drawing had been delayed indefinitely; better for him, though not perhaps for others.

The man was doomed through this passion of his decrepitude.

CHAPTER II.

THE LUCK OF LOTTERIES—HOWARD'S HEGIRA—A CATASTROPHE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

"**H**ESTER, what do you think! That confounded lottery is put off again, to the first of July this time. The directors will make a fortune out of the interest of their investment before they pay up, if they ever do. I'm afraid it's all a deuced humbug."

"I'm afraid so, too, Mr. Howard."

"No, you're not; you are delighted! Anything that worries me affords you pleasure, and always did," he grumbled, resolutely standing wide on the rug before the fire, with his back to the mantle-piece.

"I wish you could be set at rest, that is all; for I have never been sanguine about the result."

"You have not, eh? Well, I *have*! I believe Mattie Lynne was inspired to dream that dream; for she looked like a prophetess I used to know in Paris, when she sat glaring opposite to me."

"I'm sorry Mattie enacts such farces. She might be better employed," said her sister, calmly.

"Better employed? Yes, so might many of us, you among the rest—acting plays for instance, and realizing golden gains, and seeing life, instead of scribbling for magazines that don't half pay you, and vegetating in this old ghost-haunted rattle-trap! Why, the windows in my room shake and clatter like old Miss Dean's false teeth when she gets to laughing, and the hooks play loose!"

No answer to this tirade, which, after a due pause for a rejoinder, was recommenced in this wise:

"The truth is, Hester, you've never been the same woman since you left the stage. Doctor Clarke noticed how changed you were, and how much older-looking; and so did Mrs. Carisbrook. Indeed, I am sure the old lady would be charmed to have you reappear."

"Hush, Mr. Howard; not a word of that sort," interrupted Hester, coldly; "I could never take up that life again, after—" (and she hesitated) "*its fatal consequences to you.*"

She had never before alluded to his "*escapade*," nor reproached him in any way for his transgressions; but now he saw that he was impinging on forbidden ground, and wisely beat a retreat.

"You are deuced hard on me, Hester," he said, sullenly; "always were, in your quiet way."

"I do not mean to be—I do not think I have been. My study is to make you comfortable."

"What is comfort worth, when you abhor me in your sight?—and I know it, and every one knows it, even Mr. Mulgrave."

"When shall I cease to hear that man's name?" groaned Hester, wearied out by this sort of small bickering, introduced on all possible occasions, and subsiding only when she withdrew, or when the fit was over.

"Why, I thought he was your friend, your benefactor, your sweetheart, even, at one time," sneered Howard, "before your '*British charlatan*' came along—as Doctor Patterson calls the quack Trevor—and that you still liked him well enough for my peace and your own."

"You are mistaken; I tolerate him for my sister's

sake alone; his very looks insult me, and his presence is oppressive in my house; nor shall he again, with my consent, be domiciliated at Briarheath. Whatever he has done for me in the way of business, I have paid him for, in gold; and since I discovered his motives, I feel that I owe him no gratitude."

"All because he is so fond of my society, I suppose, and took such interest in our reconciliation, and even in my spiritual welfare."

"Our reconciliation! I never knew of that before; but I have suspected it of late—yes, and fathomed as well the springs that actuated such feigned interest. This much is certain: Briarheath is my only refuge, and I will not be pursued to the last fastness of my life, by those I loathe, and who have no claims on me.

"From this hour, Mr. Howard, you must, I beg, hold your prayer-meetings elsewhere. I have been sufficiently reviled in my own house by your associates, to give me reason for my prohibition; and interfere no more, I entreat, with one of the few pleasures of my life in this retirement. I *must* be suffered to select the music Mr. Steinbach plays—whether it be of opera or oratorio. That department is mine."

"I thought you had subdued your fiendish temper, Hester, and were growing more amiable—had even a hope that the grace of God was working in your stony and benighted heart; but here you are again, clean off the handle, and showing your claws from their velvet sheaths, as in the old times in California. Well, well, if I go forth again, you will have no one to blame for it but yourself."

"Forgive me, if I have offended you, Julius," she

said, alarmed by this threat. "I have had just as much reason to be angry a hundred times before, when I commanded myself to calmness; but it is my way—the last drop makes the cup, already full, run over; the last straw laid upon the camel's back of my patience breaks it."

"Well, let us be friends if we can be no more, Hester; you are a very good sort of a little woman in your way," patting her on the shoulder, "but full of whims and caprices. By-the-by, have you heard from old cat Carisbrook since she left Briarheath?"

"Don't speak of *her* in that way, Mr. Howard; don't, I beseech you. It is something I cannot bear any more. She is a perfect lady."

"It is a title not often granted to actresses," he observed, pointedly; "and I think you have done wisely in keeping your own little secret at Lynnesborough, on that head; not that it ever let you down in my opinion the least in the world, Hester; although the blood of Howard has not often been so allied."

"You will not let me be your friend," she said, looking at him sadly and fixedly. "You cannot surrender the privilege, that, from some perverted idea of the nature of our bond, you think you acquired on our marriage day, to taunt and torture me. Could you deport yourself differently to me, and resolve to hold one uniform course of courtesy at least, I could forget much that has occurred, Julius, and even try and love you again, for I am desolate; and you, my husband, are all that remains to me."

And so she left him, standing there in a dull dream, staring after her in perfect amazement, and later chuckling inwardly and soliloquizing—

"Try and love me! Well, that beats all I ever heard in my life. I didn't know women that led good lives ever did differently. I thought that all females loved their lords, even though they took on airs sometimes, and some of them even the better for a little rough treatment occasionally. Now there was Fanny Dillon, my first flame: she used to say that she wouldn't give one copper cent for a masculine that hadn't a spice of the devil in him. Got enough of that, though, I reckon, before she got through with George Johnson," laughing low. "Try and love me, indeed!"

And the aggrieved household martyr took refuge in his sanctum, where his pipes, pictures, and periodicals (most of the last of a fast and flashy character) consoled his solitude; if truth be told, truly glad to be rid of his prayer-meetings, now that the charm of their novelty was over.

I have related this conversation at length, merely to give my reader an idea of the sort of annoyance Howard knew how to inflict; and perhaps as well to prepare his tender heart for the shock of a separation from this worthy, lessened it may be, by such representations.

Mr. Mulgrave's absence was a long one, and Melissa's residence with her sister fixed for the present, and a sore trial to the latter, after the edict against the prayer-meetings, heretofore held weekly in the parlors, had gone forth—meetings which by degrees all the religious rabble of Lynnesborough had thought themselves privileged to attend.

From this time forth a sullen scowl, supposed to be thus caused, was stereotyped on her brow, and had it not have been for the secret triumph it afforded her to have

out-attorneyed her husband by so doing, she would have fain recalled the letter she had sent so impulsively, and yet at the same time so cautiously, to Doctor Trevor.

"If I ever get in hot water about that business I shall know where to throw the blame," she reflected; "I never thought of it before. What if the man should undertake to answer it and the letter fall into Howard's or Mulgrave's hands? Mattie must help me out in that case; help me to fix the matter, where it ought to be fixed, on sister Hester," and she smiled bitterly.

Mulgrave's indifference towards his wife was manifested too plainly now to be mistaken even by Melissa, and for this, too, she saw fit to thank Mrs. Howard, "the universal charmer," as she sneeringly called her.

At last he came, at the close of the winter, during which he had seldom written, determined, after searching the Union half over, to abide in Lynnesborough, where he promptly purchased a pleasant, old-fashioned residence for sale, cheap, and reluctantly removed his bride from the enchanted precincts of Briarheath.

"He wants to be near sister Hester. That's why he lingers in Lynnesborough," surmised Melissa, shrewdly. "But there are two sides to that question. One comfort is she hates him in her sight lately. I see it plainly. Can she suspect his complicity about her letter? Have I put my husband in her power by what I have foolishly done?"

No, Melissa! it was the burning glance of Mulgrave, revealing unhallowed passion, that had caused the entire revulsion in Mrs. Howard's feelings towards the man she had once tolerated and even thanked for his good offices; that eye which told a story his lips had never

dared to breathe, and which to a pure, proud woman conveys a deadlier insult than words themselves could frame, because more covert and wholly unpunishable.

She had readily forgiven his avowal of passion, when he thought her at liberty to be his wife, and the honorable manner in which he had then conducted himself had raised him in her esteem, as we have seen ; but the time was over for manifestations of that sort, and no glances like these had ever polluted her modesty before, not even when she trod the stage for all men to behold. His marriage with Melissa seemed to have changed the character of his passion only, for Mrs. Howard—not to have effaced it. It burned with a lurid fire deep in his nature, hopeless as it had become on every side, for the cherished idea that Howard might again break through the laws of society, discard decency, and become a second time an outcast—that Trevor would never renew his suit, fastidious as he was, after the publicity that had attended the trials of Mrs. Howard's married life, and that under such circumstances his chance would inevitably come some time or another—was now relinquished as infinitely futile and vain. Even if the two first should come to pass, was he not bound forever to a senseless stone, who would in her very organization survive them all, as toads do elephants, as rocks do plants and trees ?

The contemplation of his fate made him gloomy and wicked, and his glances betrayed the morbid fires that consumed him whenever they fell on the sweet, pure face that he almost devoured with his insatiable eyes.

Grieved and offended, Mrs. Howard had withdrawn, as much as possible, from his society while he remained in her house, and when he returned, after a long absence, met him coldly, and even repellingly.

Mulgrave well understood the secret cause of her behavior, never explained, but Melissa brooded over, pondered and resented it.

Coldness had now crept between the sisters, never more to be entirely dispelled, and yet in her heart Melissa knew that Hester was not to blame, and that she had been compelled to intrench herself, as she had done, behind the barriers of reserve, to escape from the evidences of Mr. Mulgrave's morbid mood. None the less did she visit the sins of the man she loved, after feminine fashion, on the head of the woman she knew to be unoffending.

Sophia Sutton was now almost at open war with the relative who had loaded her and hers with benefits, and who had never injured her by word or deed, and even Elder Sutton, for a long time her avowed champion, was cold and distant since he had ascertained her determined opposition to having her clean and quiet if simply furnished parlors converted into a noisy tabernacle, and a deposit for dirt and tobacco juice, that it took the maids a day to remove and efface, after each night meeting.

The Misses Dean and Mr. Steinbach still clung to their friend determinedly and devotedly, and from the outer world there came to her, at seasons, rare letters, golden opinions, from her literary co-workers, or from grateful spirits, who found in what she had written some echo of themselves. Criticisms, too, of her own works of every order, just, eulogistic, and malicious, met her eye in print; but among all these, she missed what above all she had asked from God, one congenial heart, never she felt to be her own on earth.

Yet, as I have said, a new sense of gratitude for the

benefits of her daily life was beginning to replace the vague cravings she had so long indulged. She was learning the secret of contentment, which is a cultivable quality (as Napoleon said courage was), and beginning to dispense with the chimera, called happiness, of which we only know the existence and possibility, by the brief glimpses we now and then catch through life of its seraphic countenance.

Through the very narrowness of her lot and its fixed nature, she was constrained to make the most of all that remained her, and like the prisoner and his "piccioli," to concentrate her interest on trifles.

On a desert island one would go into ecstasies over the bread that once was cast to the beggars, and covet the very crumbs thereof; and to Hester the coming of a pleasant book, or a letter from Mrs. Carisbrook, or her own creation of a little poem, or the introduction of a new piece of music by Mr. Steinbach, became each and all sources of delight, which to the worldling might have seemed unreasonable.

It is difficult to let our idols go; but when at last they are wrenched from our clinging embrace, and our arms close vaguely over emptiness, we learn, after a time of stunning anguish, to poise ourselves and stand alone as we never dreamed before that we could do, and grow strong in and through our very desolation.

It is those who have suffered, and surmounted suffering, that enjoy most keenly the delicate shades of life, things whose true value is lost on the exuberance of happy inexperience.

The summer came at last, and to Mr. Howard's satisfaction, the drawing of the lottery on which he had

staked his convictions as well as his money was not again postponed. It occurred late in July.

A wild burst of exultation in the hall below roused Hester from her slumbers one fine July morning. She looked over the balusters in her night dress, and saw Mr. Howard reading a paper, while James Sellers stood respectfully before him.

"Faith, sir, an' are you shure it's the big prize? How many millions? I forgits my figgers sometimes, sir," and he scratched his head.

"No millions at all, you rascal; only thousands, ten of 'em, at that. There it is: can you read, or are you only pretending? Nos. 1053—10, that's the gridiron and 204—Hester—I say—Hester!"

"Here I am, Mr. Howard; what is it? I thought the house was on fire, or that Deacon Simmons had arrived. I knew you expected him daily."

"Deacon Simmons be—roasted—no such thing! The dreams are out, that's all; and Julius Howard, Esq., is ten thousand dollars richer than he was last night. What do you think now, eh? Is Mattie Lynne a little witch, or not?"

"It is very astonishing, certainly. Please send me the paper when you have done with it. I shall need the verification of my own senses, for I fear you are quizzing me, Julius."

"Send little speckle-face down for it at once then, you unbelieving Thomas. Here, Myry Clay, take this sheet up-stairs, and bring it back as soon as Mrs. Howard is satisfied of the truth. Fortune has treated me so shabbily heretofore that she can't believe the old dame is not *past* relenting."

"I congratulate you," said Hester, over the baluster, "that is, as far as we can see into it, on your good fortune. Pray heaven you use it well!"

"That's the way; always croaking. Get my trunk ready, garçong; James, I mean. I may pick up Pierre La Tour yet in New York, and get the rest of my baggage. In the meantime put up everything I possess in the world, except that snuff-colored suit I promised you; take that to remember me by, and tell the cook to give me a bite at once. I'm off on the first train for Spikesville."

"But you're coming back, sir, *this* time," said James, anxiously, for the present he was receiving seemed to him to bear something of the nature of a parting pledge of affection, and he had no idea of foregoing his small share of the "ten thousand," which seemed to him almost a fabulous amount of dollars, more realizable, as it was to his brain, than millions.

"Coming back? Who said I was not? Tell Mrs. Howard," to Myra Clay, who approached him timidly with the restored paper, for she stood in deadly fear of him, and trembled at his voice, "tell Mrs. Howard I am about to take a journey, and ask her to come down as soon as she can, and give me a last comfortable breakfast."

"Yes, sir;" and the relieved child departed cheerfully on her errand. Strangely enough, Mrs. Howard wept when she saw him departing bag and baggage, and clung to him affectionately. All the past surged over her; California, the children, their youth, wherein she still hoped to see him reform, and knew not the deep corruption of his nature, and perhaps there mingled with these some vague presentiment.

"Do take care of yourself, Julius," she said; "you know how imprudent you are sometimes, and invest your money judiciously for your own sake. It would be so pleasant to you to have even a small, regular income, all your own, Julius. I should have enough, you know, without wanting a cent of it. I am quite disinterested in thus urging you to caution and forethought."

"Oh, I know it; I know it. You never had a selfish bone in your body, I will say that for you; but there is Jeemes with the rockaway, and McCullom with his cart. Lend a hand there, Kitty Cline, to that trunk, help to heave her up; here's my bag, gargon, and now good-by, Hester; if you get lonesome, send for the Sutons, or for the Deans."

Thus parted two united at the altar who never met again in life, nor will we believe in death; for the artificial tie that bound them on earth (like a greyhound and a cur unmeetly leashed together) has no recognition beyond the portals of the grave.

It can never be known precisely what Mr. Howard's intentions were on setting out, though James Sellers, to his dying day, will believe that he meant to do just what he did.

He wrote to Hester from New York, that having received his money, all in solvent notes, with a heavy percentage off, about which he raged on paper, he believed he would take a little trip to Canada before returning to his hum-drum life, partly to get rid of certain creditors who were already "hounding" him, as he expressed it.

"I shall get a box of British silks and laces, lawns, and other gewgaws smuggled over the border by a friend of mine who has promised to help me to elude our

monstrous revenue laws (a principle with me, I confess), and send them to you in a few days, partly for Melissa and Mattie. Have my rooms in order early in August; give James the snuff-colored suit if he has not already taken it, for it is not in my trunk, and make my adieux to my friends—the deacon, elder, and doctor—and assure them of my continuance in the ways of grace.”

This was one of the paragraphs of a somewhat incoherent letter, ending with the words, which might or might not have been ironical:

“With much affection for my poor, long-suffering wife, of whom I was never worthy,

“I remain her devoted husband,

“JULIUS HOWARD.”

“Send no papers to Briarheath to-day,” said Mr. Mulgrave to the postmaster, a few days after the receipt of this letter, as he was sorting out the morning’s mail. “Nor to-morrow either, if this news be repeated,” and he pointed out a paragraph containing startling intelligence.

A train on the northern road had, during the night, collided with another and been destroyed by fire, with every soul in the sleeping-cars, men, women and children.

A mass of charred and blackened flesh and bones was all that remained of youth, age, manhood, beauty, infancy, guilt and innocence. Among these sufferers was Julius Howard.

Very tenderly was this news broken to Hester by the man who truly loved her in his way, and his wife, Melissa, acting under his direction and advice. She never knew the worst—never knew that the coffin that

was laid in the Lynne vault by those of their little children, contained only a charred fragment of obliterated humanity said to be her husband's remains, recognized alone by the peculiarity of watch and seal.

Better than any one else had she understood the intentions of her husband from the time she received his letter, and her suffering was only changed from anxiety to certainty, by the knowledge of his sudden and dreadful demise. To be killed on the cars in the heyday of reckless expectation seemed to her very fearful; but she knew no more than this. The coffin had been hermetically closed, her friends told her, and must remain so. The exigencies of the season demanded this, and she could not be permitted to see her husband's face again.

It was a pious fraud, but well thought of, perhaps; for the horror of her own imagination must have pursued her else to frenzy, so Mulgrave feared—he who had planned the deception successfully, and managed to carry it through.

It was never known what disposition Mr. Howard had made of his money; but it was supposed he carried it about him in a belt or wallet, which was destroyed or stolen. Strangely enough, the day on which he was killed was the 24th of July, thus confirming the significance of the other figures, which, even to the broil-fish, seemed mysteriously to portend his fate.

And now life truly dragged to Hester Howard. She would not permit herself to have a thought beyond that wretched ending of an unworthy existence which still had been so closely linked with hers, that loyalty itself in the end of all was almost as powerful in her heart as affection.

She would not, must not, think of Doctor Trevor at

such a time, in any other relation than that he now occupied; and she made Mattie, who alluded carelessly to certain possibilities, promise her solemnly, that neither from herself nor from Doctor Bellair, should any intimation of her widowhood reach his ear.

"I think you are perfectly right, sister Hester; perfectly right, after the manner in which he has behaved to you, to cut him off. I know that Doctor Bellair will be guided entirely by your wish. He has the highest regard for female delicacy."

"Of course he has, dear Mattie; and I earnestly hope your husband *will* be reticent about my affairs; but what has Doctor Trevor done?"

"Oh, neglected you shamefully. I know he got your long letter. Did he ever answer it?"

"He never received it, Mattie," with her eyes dilated now, her nostrils quivering, her hands closely clasped. "What, *what* makes you think he did?"

"Well, if you must know, I saw a letter lately, in which he referred to some things it contained, to Doctor Bellair, marked 'confidential.' I had occasion to go in his secretary (he is careless about his keys), and the mysterious word 'private' catching my eye excited my curiosity, so I read it."

"That was very dishonorable, Mattie."

"Well, that is not the point just now. You can preach another time. The gist of the matter is, that I understood him to assert some circumstances attending your life in California (respecting things Doctor Bellair had heard), as related by yourself in a long, confidential letter, in which you had given him many details, both as friend and physician. He referred to his expectation

of receiving such a letter from you when we were on our journey; so I know it was the same."

"Mattie, you bewilder me. I feel that the very pillars of creation are shaken, if he is false."

"How false, sister Hester? only thoughtless and inconsistent, that is all; I always knew him frivolous."

"You must not say such things of a man like him. He is purity, dignity, truth itself; or if he is not, these qualities themselves are falsehoods."

"I might leave you to the enjoyment of your delusions, sister Hester, if it were not best for you to know the truth. He has gone back to England to be married. There, it is out."

"Did he write this also to Doctor Bellair, dear Mattie? He will send us his cards, probably," with a sad, strange smile, after a weary pause.

"Yes, we expect them by the next packet. He will do very well, people say, as to rank and beauty and all that; only, only, the lady is a little crazy."

"Pure benevolence, no doubt," said Mrs. Howard, calmly; "he finds that he can make her life tolerable by his peculiar gift, perhaps, and so sacrifices his inclination. There never lived a nobler man than he."

"You are incorrigible, sister Hester. Well, may be so; but I am yet to see the man capable of marrying for pure benevolence, just as I believe, with Rosalind, 'that men have died and worms have eaten them, but not for love.' By-the-by, did you ever act Rosalind when you were Mrs. Myrtis Lynne?"

"Never, Mattie," and she looked surprised. "I could never bear to assume male attire."

"That phase of your life was the point at issue, I be-

lieve, between Trevor and Bellair; and thus your letter was referred to for authority. It was so queer he never answered it."

Mattie had left behind her bitter food for reflection, when she went gayly back to Ilium with her enamoured husband, who gave the demanded promise not to signify, unless questioned about it, Mrs. Howard's widowed condition to Doctor Trevor, as it was a point with that lady about which she was tenacious, "and you know what was once said," added Mattie. "You can't think how it annoys sister Hester, even to hear that matter alluded to now."

"Why I thought she liked him, and even contemplated a divorce; didn't you tell me so?"

"I don't remember. I only know she can't bear to hear his name mentioned now. Something about a letter has provoked her."

"Indeed? Perhaps I could set that straight."

"Well, you had better not try; that is, if you wish to retain her good will, I assure you, for there are subjects she is unreasonable about, and this is one. Sister Hester will never marry. She will become a lay sister, I think, in the Protestant (not Catholic) church. I see religion 'seething in her brain.' I know her so perfectly."

"I have just had a letter, by-the-by, forwarded to me from Trevor" (they were on their way home when this conversation took place). You can read it, Mattie, and see what he says. I wish I had thought of giving it to you to show your sister; it might have allayed her prejudice."

And Mattie read:

"MY DEAR BELLAIR:

"On the point of leaving England, whither I came to

see my father die, and to receive from his hands a charge more painful than any I have ever had thrust on me or undertaken—that of a young girl and her property (for he, with my consent, bequeathed to her all he possessed), a child whose almost angelic beauty recalls to mind forcibly the face of her father, my *deadliest enemy*.

“I have placed her in safe and conscientious hands, invested her property in bonds bearing good interest, and I shall now leave her, I trust, forever, as well as the shores of England, made repulsive to me by the bitterest associations possible to man.

“I am again a wanderer, as I have given up my residence at Symar, and shall plunge deeper still into ‘the shining Orient’ before we meet again, if indeed that time ever comes at all.

“Write to me at Damascus, to the care of our consul there, Robert Sibley, Esq., an old friend of mine, by-the-way, in California, where he occupied the same position at one time he does now here, and if your letter strikes me, I shall respond. But I may be ‘off and away’ before it gets there; in which case, it will pursue me, probably, around the globe, and after all I may not receive it ever.

“When I find rest again for the soles of my feet, I shall remind you of my existence; in the meantime do not quite forget your friend,

“MORDAUNT TREVOR.”

“P. S.—Tell me of your wife and of her family, when you write; of Mrs. Howard, especially.”

“Talk of a woman’s postscript,” murmured Mattie.
“He has condensed his whole heart in those last three

words," and returning the letter without comment, she affected to go to sleep on her husband's shoulder.

"I wonder who the ward is, or *what*, to whom he makes such mysterious and pleasant reference! Sister Hester knows, I dare say. I have a great mind to let him send her the letter, if only to get an explanation in return.

"But no; I will do nothing of the kind. It is much better for her to believe, what I was fully confident of myself until the last few moments, that he went to England to be married. I suppose when he has completed the tour of the globe, 'taken a savage mate,' and 'herded with narrow foreheads' to his heart's content, he will come rambling back this way again, houseless and moneyless, to marry sister Hester. I can imagine him with his hair long and gray, and his skin, like parchment, drawn above his bones. The pilgrim quack advancing with a 'withered palm-branch in his hand.'"

CHAPTER III.

MULGRAVE'S MALADY CULMINATES—CLAIRVOYANCE—THE
WANDERER'S RETURN—THE WIDOW'S WELCOME.

SIX weary months had come and gone since the occurrence of the frightful catastrophe which had destroyed Mr. Howard and his treasure together, and left Hester to utter solitude, for after the first violence of her grief was over, the friends she had offended before so unwittingly subsided again into injured silence.

They had gathered about her for a time on universal principles of interest in the recently bereaved; but with her first excitement faded theirs, and she was again forsaken by her kindred.

One winter's afternoon, as she sat by her library fire, trying to fix her attention on a book just sent to her by its author, yet starting ever and anon nervously at the wild blasts that raged in paroxysms against the windows, she was suddenly aware of Mr. Mulgrave's unexpected presence.

"He must have come in by the side door," she thought, "for I should have heard the bell had he entered through the vestibule, and how quietly he stole into the room! I never knew myself so absent before. What can he want?" and an unexplained shudder went through her frame, as he advanced creepingly towards her.

"Sit down, Mr. Mulgrave," she said; "you have faced a bitter wind this afternoon. I could scarcely stand against it on the portico a moment since. Something impelled me to go out and meet it, though, in all its violence."

"Yes, the wind is cold," he said, mournfully, "but not so cold, Hester, as a heart estranged. It is time all this misunderstanding should have an end," and he cast his cloak aside and stood before her pale and wild. "I have come to make you a fair proposition, and a final one, my dear, for I know you love me as much as I love you. I have been persuaded of it for some time, and as the only obstacle is removed that divided us," seating himself gently as he spoke, "why may we not be happy in our own way and go to Europe together? I know a place on the Rhine," he whispered, drawing his chair close to hers,

"where we could live concealed so happily all our days, a lovely home covered with vines and flowers. I have written to my agent there to purchase it for our bridal bower, dear Hester."

And he placed his hand on the back of her chair and glared into her face with his lurid, fiery eyes.

"Of course we will give Melissa the slip and all the folks at Sliding Stone," and he suddenly clasped her wrist with a vice-like grasp that held her in her chair like the clutch of fate, speaking hoarsely.

"Say, when can you be ready? I came to see whether you could go at once. We have no time to lose, situated as we are. Trevor is after me, you know, about that letter of yours, and I don't care to have the matter exposed or sifted, principally on his account, of course, not mine. We can't depend any longer on Melissa's secrecy, dear love, for I suppose she considers herself my wife and will feel aggrieved. Isn't it an absurd situation for a man like me to be placed in?" laughing low.

"Absurd, indeed," said Hester, as manfully as she could, for she understood matters now, and knew that the madman who had her in his power must be humored. She sat perfectly still, almost spell-bound as well as coerced to quiet, but with her disengaged hand managed gradually to reach the bell-spring by the mantle-jamb, while she suddenly diverted his attention.

"Look how it snows!" she said, "and, Mr. Mulgrave! what is that strange bird at the window? look!" Without relinquishing his hold he turned his head mechanically to see; and she, while he did so, pressed several times in succession the bell which rang in a distant pantry.

It seemed to her hours before the slow, sure foot of James Sellers was heard approaching, unheeded by Mulgrave, however, who again preferred his strange and dreadful suit.

"You had better take all your valuables, dear; the rest we will leave to the Philistines; and I will surround you with every luxury. Hester, my Hester, none ever loved, adored you as I have done. I have sometimes feared my brain would burst thinking of you and your beauty; and lying at night by that loathly, white, fishy woman, who compelled me to marry her," whispering again frightfully, "for fear of exposure, you know, my love, about that letter, and then you would have despised me; but now—but now—" and he strove to clasp her in his arms. In the brief but to her surpassingly dreadful struggle that ensued, James Sellers entered, followed by Myra Clay, who had come opportunely with a paper-cutter for which she had been some time searching up-stairs.

"Hold him, James Sellers. Oh, God! he is mad, he is mad! Myra, fly for Doctor Patterson: tell him to come instantly. Send Mr. McCollum here as you pass, and call Kitty Cline. Don't leave him one minute, James, until they all come," and flying to her own chamber she locked the door, and cast herself half fainting on her bed.

Weeks of brain-fever ensued for the offender, and then Mulgrave slowly recovered, clear of head and deft of hand as ever, and entirely cured of that wild passion that had nearly wrecked his being. For a long time Mrs. Howard shunned him as one would do a dog that had shown symptoms of hydrophobia; but his mental atmos-

phere was really cleared by that culmination of misplaced and diseased affection, and she consented at last to see, for the first time, Melissa and her husband together, when their boy was born.

She gathered enough, however, from that distressing interview to lead her to surmise the truth or something approaching to it, about her ill-starred letter; but Doctor Trevor never knew, nor did Mrs. Howard herself, by what mysterious agency the long-delayed package was at last sent to its rightful owner.

The climate of New Orleans had proved pernicious to Sydney Lynne, and it was a fortunate thing for his half-sister that he threw up his employment there about that time and came back to Lynnesborough to seek some other channel of employment. He was a fine and manly youth, more like Hester than any of her father's children, and she took him speedily to her confidence and affection.

He found the occupation he desired to obtain in Lynnesborough and lived at Briarheath by invitation of its mistress, at once diminishing his expenses and affording her the protection she now felt necessary to her peace of mind and safety even.

His evenings were passed with his sister in her library, where she did all in her power to develop his tastes and direct his intellect, and finding him gifted and ambitious, she urged him to abandon the meagre business from which he scarcely realized a livelihood, and study law, while he could do so under her roof and in Mulgrave's office.

She found her brother a rough diamond, and shaped him into a many-sided brilliant by her encouragement

and exertions for his improvement, and she has the satisfaction now of knowing that her woman's hand and heart formed one of the forensic ornaments of his native State.

Doctor Bellair was not the only correspondent Trevor possessed in Ilium. Through this gentleman a few grateful patients occasionally communicated with one they deemed their benefactor; and among these was Miss McClane.

She had written to him of Mrs. Howard's striking appearance at Mattie's wedding (for it was understood that this was the subject he preferred to any other; and his love for Hester had been confided to his friend when he had hoped to make her his wife), and now she wrote again to tell him that the woman he had despaired of possessing was free at last.

The letter followed him to Tartary, and was a year in making its transit. So that the lines reached him in August that had been written the summer before. He lost no time in commencing his homeward journey, and arrived at Paris in the autumn to meet letters there from Bellair and Mattie, neither of whom made any allusion to their sister's widowed condition.

"She may be married again by this time," he reflected. "She has gone, no doubt, forth from her retirement—needful only while her husband lived—and must be the cynosure of all eyes wherever she appears. None the less shall I undertake the voyage that is to confirm my happiness or make me a wanderer on the face of the earth again; for already I fear I have lost her."

He had engaged places in the diligence for himself and Caspar and little John, when he was stricken down

so suddenly by inflammatory fever, contracted during his late journey, that he lay helplessly in Paris until spring, faithfully cared for by Mlle. Therese Coquelicot, who was fortunately residing in that city with her relatives on the bounty of Doctor Trevor, and fed and ministered to like a little child, by his attendants, on account of his disabled hands.

He could not hold a pen nor shape a word to Hester himself, and his rare reserve made him unwilling to commit this sacred task to any other. Day by day he hoped to improve sufficiently to be enabled to guide his own spoon or fork to his mouth, or lift his handkerchief to wipe his clammy brow; but all in vain. He could stand, and even walk, while still his hands were incurably stiff and lame and intolerably painful.

In April he received another letter from Miss McClane which roused him to agony, and determined him, in spite of his crippled condition, to rally to the struggle which now lay before him; for it was rumored in Ilium by this time, that its congressional representative, a man of splendid talents and appearance, not over five-and-forty years of age, immensely rich, and respected by high and low for his moral worth, had made an offer of his hand to Mrs. Howard.

"She was entertaining the proposition very seriously," Mattie had told her, for Mrs. Howard was then on a visit to the Bellairs, "and but for her insanity about Doctor Trevor, I believe she would not hesitate to close the matter at once." These were the words of her sister, said truthful Miss McClane in the beginning of her letter.

There was a postscript written a few days later, in

which occurred simply these words, "I fear you are too late;" and these, more than aught else in the epistle, brought Doctor Trevor to his sudden resolution.

"We set off to-morrow, Caspar," said his master to this tried companion of his wanderings, "even if you have to lead me like a child. I have business in the United States that can no longer be delayed; and you and little John must get me through as best you may, for I shall establish Mlle. Coquelicot where she is."

"Shall I pack the trunks this evening, sir?"

"Yes, at once. Take out twenty gold pieces for my doctor's fee (regular physicians do not attend quacks for nothing, as they do one another), twenty more for Mlle. Coquelicot to begin house-keeping with, and enough wherewith to settle our hotel bills. Then we shall be at liberty to go."

And this was all that heralded the sudden departure of the invalid, who found himself on board of an American vessel bound for New York two days later.

Whether the mild sea air wrought a favorable effect on his neuralgic hands, or whether the disease had culminated and yielded in the course of nature, before vigor of constitution and energy of mind, cannot well be determined; but certain it is, that after the first five days out, Doctor Trevor was able once more to sit at the table and help himself like a Christian.

"I am so glad your poor hands are better," said a mild voice near him one day, as he hung over the bulwarks watching with strange fascination the amethystine whirls and white foams of the waves succeeding one another endlessly, as do the generations of mankind on earth.

He turned to see the mild blue eyes of a delicate-looking young creature who, clinging to her father's arm—a stalwart man of fifty—had stopped to say a few courteous words to one who had singularly attracted and interested her, in her peculiar spontaneous manner.

"Thank you," he said, "your congratulations are very pleasant to me, for I see they are heartfelt."

"Oh! yes; I have been such a sufferer myself, as papa knows. He has taken me everywhere for relief, and I have never found it yet."

"Your trouble is a nervous one, my gentle girl, I see by the very expression of your face and eyes. You must be patient, hopeful and serene; and all will yet go well."

"She is a somnambulist," said her father, hastily, "and has been a little overtaxed lately in her vocation. I am taking her to America for change of scene. Her peculiar gift, that of clairvoyance, excited the attention of the first savants in Europe"

"Oh, it isn't a gift of mine at all, papa, you know; but your own power that commands me, for you must remember how you influenced Emma, who had never dreamed of such a thing as being a medium, and now she is as nervous as I am."

"I have heard that the exercise of this receptive faculty was very pernicious to health," said Doctor Trevor, "have never indeed but once—" and he hesitated.

"Tried to elicit it?" continued the dark-browed father; "that is what you would say. Did you fail then, sir, or succeed, let me ask?"

"I succeeded; but regretted the attempt."

"Yet we are told by Scripture," pursued the man, "not to hide our light under a bushel. What is the use

of possessing such a capacity if it is not to be demonstrated for the benefit of others? Treasures have been found, secrets dragged to light involving the rights of many; heritages determined, poems suggested, problems and enigmas solved, all through the agency of this little trembling girl, who is afraid of her own shadow."

"And health sacrificed as well, I fear, in the mighty drainage of nervous fluid and of vital strength requisite to these ends. I am a physician myself, and I counsel you to forbear."

"And I, sir, am a magnetic agent, or nothing—ruined in fortune, and with no other chance of speedily realizing wealth, save by such means as I possess within myself. It was by the merest chance I discovered the faculty in myself, and the temperament of my daughter favored its development. She will, of course, be the principal beneficiary."

"I think if I could rest a little while, I should be much brighter, papa, and more profound than you have found me lately. Sometimes he cannot get me to go to sleep at all," she said, smiling up in Doctor Trevor's face, faintly; "and then the experiment fails, you know."

"In a few days more you shall have a sample of this family faculty of ours," observed the stolid-looking man, who owned this drooping lily. "Before we leave the ship, I intend that Lucy shall exhibit her wonderful power as a clairvoyante for the satisfaction of all on board, hoping in this way to put forth a sort of advertisement in advance of our 'séances.' I assure you, sir, there is not the least charlatanry about anything we do, and as (from the suggestion you dropped a while ago) I believe you to be also, to some degree, magnetic, you

can better, than most others, understand and believe my assertion."

"I can; yet I should be sorry to see your daughter further experimented on in her fragile condition. Let her rest, I beg, for the present."

"She has her bread to make," said the man, dryly. "I cannot give it to her in any other way just now, nor is she strong enough to go to service, nor wise enough to teach nor act; for owing to her peculiar condition of health, she had little schooling. This is all that she can do."

"Come, father; we are tiring this gentleman who is so kind as to pity poor little me," and she clasped her hands about her father's arm, and hanging childishly upon him, drew him away.

"I do not think he means to be unkind to her," mused Doctor Trevor; "nevertheless, he is murdering his own child. Those blue eyes will haunt him painfully some day when it is 'too late.' Alas! that sentence condenses all the bitterness of life!"

It was announced a few days before the ship reached the harbor that Mr. and Miss Gardiner would give a "séance," open to all passengers, and that some astonishing revelations would then be made through the means of magnetism and "clairvoyance."

It was not without deep interest and curiosity blended that Doctor Trevor found himself one of a decorous and excited crowd assembled and seated at the appointed hour, in the long cabin of the steamer "Siren," and having drawn as near as possible to the circle—left clear for the Gardiners—he anxiously awaited the performance.

"You resist me, Lucy," said her father, hoarsely, and

in low tones, to the still sleepless girl, after half an hour had passed in ineffectual efforts on his part to produce the requisite mesmeric trance.

"You would not have me pretend, would you, dear father?" she murmured, in reply; "and I cannot help it. I continue to be wide awake!"

"There is so much at stake; remember, Lucy, your mother, and the rest, so poor, so poor!" and the man groaned.

"I do—I do; but I am powerless," and she clasped her hands, piteously. "Father, remember, I warned you! it was that champagne last night! I—I heard the cork fly in your stateroom. I knew then you would fail!"

The hands of Mr. Gardiner—and large and strong ones they were—fell powerless on his knee.

"I might as well give it up," he muttered, with a face of agony; for now there were symptoms apparent in the crowd of dissatisfaction and derision both; low murmurs, hacking coughs, loud clearings of the throat were audible from all sides, and some blasphemous wag called out, "How long, oh Lord! how long?"

"Directly, gentlemen and ladies, I hope and believe," said Mr. Gardiner, in rejoinder to this sally, wiping the sweat-drops from his swarthy brow; while Lucy sighed.

"I am assisting you," breathed a low voice beside him; "continue your passes even if not efficacious. Mine shall not fail, and she will slumber soon."

No one in the crowd remarked the fixed and dream-like aspect of the man who sat very nearly behind Lucy Gardiner, occasionally lowering and lifting his right hand, as though to balance himself on his chair, as the ship

lurched, but in reality weaving a mighty charm. In a few moments more his spell began to work, and the white-fringed lids of Lucy Gardiner drooped low over the large, blue eyes, so fully opened a few moments before, and it was evident to the most sceptical that she slept as profoundly as if under the influence of an opiate.

"Let me ask her a few questions before any one else," said Doctor Trevor to her father, speaking low. "I have a scientific interest in this matter, and I wish fully to test the reality of this clairvoyance, which yet I reprehend as so fatal to a fragile thing like this."

"Your questions," said her father, "must of course be communicated through me, and I will put yours, if you will tell me what you wish to ask in communication with her prophetic faculty."

"Not so," murmured Trevor. "It is I who, from the nature of events to-day, have sole possession of the clairvoyante faculty of your daughter, and I will fling forth the falcon from my own wrist, in my own way. Afterwards you may whistle it, and see if you can bring it to perch on yours." Then lifting his voice, he said, calmly, so that all could hear, "Describe to me the library at Briarheath, at this moment, and tell me of its inmates. What and whom do you behold?" and he raised and lowered his hand.

"A pleasant room, large and light, well furnished; with book-cases, globes, sofas, a table and a piano. There is a bay window."

"All libraries are like that," said a voice; "be more specific."

"Stop, if you please," and Doctor Trevor lifted his hand impressively; "there must be no interruption. Go on, Miss Gardiner. What else do you perceive?"

"An old man at the piano; he looks like a foreigner; he wears green glasses; he seems to be playing, for his fingers move, but I cannot hear him. He has a rose in his button-hole. Oh! and such a funny little freckle-face girl comes now with a glass of water," and she laughed, a sweet young girlish laugh.

"And is that all?"

"No; the door opens now, and a lady enters, but still the old man plays on. She has a letter in her hand. She sits by the fire and reads it; it is an open coal fire, burning brightly, though the window is thrown up and the curtains are put aside—the heavy crimson curtains."

"Describe that lady."

"I cannot, for her face is in shadow; but she seemed to me very beautiful as she came in. She wears black clothing, crêpe and bombazine. Now she gets up and goes to a writing desk and draws a chair before it and sits down. I see, she has opened it; she is writing a letter."

"What are the first words?" he asked, incautiously.

"The writing is hard to read. I can scarcely make them out. Yes; now I follow her, though she writes fast," and she seemed to read slowly the commencement of the page, hesitating as a child would do between the words.

"The—proposal—with—which—you—honor—me—my—dear—Judge Warburton—deserves—I—know—the—further—consideration—you—suggest."

"Hold!" interrupted Doctor Trevor, "no more of that, if you please. We have no wish, no right, to penetrate the secrets of this or of any lady's correspondence. It is enough. I have proved the truth of your clairvoyance," he remarked; gravely adding, as he rose, "I make

way now for others," and he laid his hand lightly, yet significantly, on the shoulder of Mr. Gardiner, "expound; I give you power," were the words he spoke in a voice that reached no other ear, and reseated himself, but at a distance now from the charmed circle.

Nor did the apt and apposite replies of the sleeping girl thereafter fail once to satisfy the most sceptical person present of her possession of a wondrous faculty, which, whether we consider it as a direct gift of Providence, or as a sixth sense, the growth of the enlarged intellect of the age, is equally marvellous and mysterious.

During the remainder of the voyage Doctor Trevor was much occupied with Mr. Gardiner and his daughter, both of whom he tested fully, and found to be ordinary persons; the man self-poised and persistent, and inclined to indolent and sensuous habits, yet strong and well organized physically; the girl sensitive, gentle and ignorant, with a great deal of child-like naïveté and unreserve of nature, yet modest and pure-minded.

He pondered long on the problem of this almost miraculous faculty, as it still seems to men, and came to the conclusion that in the course of events the clews to its subtle labyrinth would be discovered, to rest as certainly in natural philosophy (not spiritual gifts at all) as does the Voltaic battery, or the electric telegraph. "It will be a common detective agency," he mused, "in those future ages when the secrets of nature shall all be laid bare (as one after one of them is now in process of unfolding), and laws will be passed to restrict it to legitimate ends, even as people are now obliged to build the windows of their houses so as not to overlook the privacy of their neighbors.

"It is a morbid faculty at best," he thought; "the hot-house growth of over-strained and excitable nerves, and as such, away with it, in every case. The power I wield has seldom been desecrated to such uses; shall never be again."

It was evening, a chilly one in the end of April, when Doctor Trevor opened the iron gate of Briarheath and entered the still barren-looking grounds where the crocus and the yellow daffodil and a few hardy hyacinths alone proclaimed the tread of spring upon the sward.

One window below stairs alone was open, and that he knew belonged to the library; but the closed shutters everywhere else gave a sombre and repulsive look to the gray building, square, massive, and inelegant in its style of architecture.

"She is absent, I suppose, at Ilium again, probably, and the Misses Dean, no doubt, are keeping house at Briarheath, and will greet me like two gorgons when I enter; which heaven forbid. Oh, Hester! what if indeed I prove to be too late! That letter, even in its beginning, if correctly rendered, admitted so much distracting doubt. She would write just in that style, I know, whether to refuse or accept an offer of marriage, at the first, and I have seemed so dilatory."

These were his thoughts as he ascended the granite steps that led to the portico of Briarheath and rang its portal bell, the sound of which came back to his ear funereally.

After a slight delay the door was opened by a slender and handsome young man, in whose face shone the violet eyes of Hester Howard; her brother, he knew at a glance, who, extending his hand to him, greeted him as "Judge Warburton," cordially.

"I thought you would be coming this way before long, sir," added Sydney Lynne, as he pointed the way to the library. "She is there; I will suffer you to announce yourself."

"But I am not Judge Warburton," said Trevor, speaking in a low and husky tone, "only a stranger from over the seas, desirous to see Mrs. Howard for a few moments privately."

"Enter, I beg, in that case, unattended," said the young man, throwing open the door of the library; then passing down the hall swiftly, he was lost to sight before Trevor crossed its threshold.

Hester was sitting wrapped in reverie in front of the glimmering fire, as he, who at that moment filled her thoughts, crossed the apartment, and stood for a moment unperceived behind the gothic chair, against the back of which her head was cast, with all its wealth of hair, while one hand was pressed above her dreaming eyes, wearied with watching, waiting, straining in the dark for a light that came not, that might never come.

She heard the hurried breathing at her ear; starting, she rose, and pushing aside the chair confronted the newcomer, whose face was lost in shadow as he stood.

Then suddenly recognizing him as he breathed her name, she uttered a faint cry, and stretched her hands to meet his fervent grasp, and standing thus, while he, too, continued mute, she gazed upon him long and silently.

"You are come at last," she said. "I knew you would. That is—if—but Mordaunt, I have feared you dead!"

"And acted on the thought," he murmured. "Is it so? Hester, speak to me at once, and let me know the

worst that can befall me! Am I in time, or have I come too late?"

And his voice sank to a whisper in speaking these last words, and his head drooped upon his heaving breast.

She did not answer him; she could not then, for emotion silenced her; but she looked into his face with eyes that spoke as plainly as words could have done, and in the next moment he had drawn her to his heart.

"Did you think," she said, when the wild sobbing to which she had given way was over, and she lay passively upon his breast, still standing on the spot where first they met, "did you think that I had kindled my watch-fire on the steep to put it out before the morning, and leave the ship in darkness? Or did you dream that to a soul like mine substitution was possible in love?"

"Hester, I should have known you better than to have suffered one fear to unman me of your perfect truth, your patient trust; but such stories have been rife—"

"I know," she interrupted him; "and now sit there, for I have erred in courtesy already in keeping my dear and honored guest standing so long," and she gently disengaged herself from his embrace, and smiling, forced him into the chair she had occupied, while she drew a foot-stool to his very feet, and there reclining, told him all he asked to know.

When she had concluded her relation, he said, eagerly, "But even your young brother was evidently expecting 'Judge Warburton,' for he addressed me by his name, and welcomed me as an awaited guest."

"I have made him no explanations," she rejoined, "and he knows of a recent letter from Judge Warburton,

and its character, not from myself, but from Mattie. I fear, indeed, that it was through her mistaken encouragement and zeal that this gentleman renewed his suit to me, which I told him from the beginning was entirely hopeless, and I was sorry to have to repeat the same painful assurance."

"I would like much to know the framing of that letter, for a reason that I shall tell you presently—yours I mean, and from no idle curiosity, rest well assured; not alone its contents, but the form of its first phrase."

She rose at once to seek the copy she had kept, simply because a blot had fallen on the original just as she had concluded it, not that she had cared to duplicate it otherwise.

"The fact was, Mordaunt," she said, as she gave it to his hand, "Mr. Steinbach came down with such a thundering chord just as I was signing my name, that my hand swerved as a horse does at a shadow, and this blotch was the consequence. Of course it would have been a want of self-respect to send a blotted page, as well as a breach of ceremony with regard to one I desired to treat with the greatest courtesy. Besides, you know he might have thought it a jet-black tear of regret," and she laughed at her own folly.

The letter began in the very words that the clairvoyante had revealed to him. And then Hester heard the story.

"See!" he said; "for fear of forgetting them, I wrote down at once in my memorandum-book the expressions Miss Gardiner transferred to my ear with difficulty from your page; for the poor little thing read writing with an effort, by her own acknowledgment.

No, do not refuse me this satisfaction. I want to afford you the last proof of the wonderful truth of a much disputed faculty."

"Yet she faltered on the threshold, as it seems; she did not follow me far."

"No, for I checked her, and should have done so, on consideration, before she uttered three words, had not interest held me spell-bound. As it was, my curiosity was never gratified, for the expression employed only served to perplex me and to drive me like a blast before it to Briarheath."

"Where no blast shall vex you more," and she rose and stood before him in her sweet and majestic beauty. "Trevor, I am truly your Esther now, forever."

The long conference in the library lasted until supper was served, and Myra Clay came as usual to announce it. She started as she saw her mistress standing before the fire, while her head reposed on the shoulders of a man whose arm encircled her waist.

Mrs. Howard had not rung for lights, as she ordinarily did long before this hour; but the bituminous flame of the smouldering fire springing suddenly to life now partially illumined the apartment, and revealed the attitude of its inmates, before which Myra retreated aghast.

It was understood in the household before the evening was over, however, that Doctor Trevor had returned, and for what end; for as she entered the dining-room, leaning on his arm, in the presence of Myra Clay and Kitty Cline, where Sydney Lynne sat patiently awaiting the coming of his sister and her guest, she said to him in tones almost exultant in their joy—

"This, Sydney, is your brother—*greet each other.*"

Years have passed since, in the library of the house in which her life awoke and where she had suffered so deeply, Hester Howard was married, with few witnesses, by the same grand ceremony that had united her to her first husband, to Mordaunt Trevor; years that have scarcely known a shadow, save that which the sorrows of others have cast upon the path of two devoted spirits so closely linked that we might deem, from even one such rare instance, Plato's belief to be the true one, though in this tangle of cross-questions that men call life the divided nature does not always reunite.

They went abroad immediately after their marriage, Hester and Mordaunt, and saw the face of Europe hand in hand; then, in obedience to an old allegiance of his nature, Trevor selected Italy for their abiding place. They dwell in Florence, surrounded by all beautiful things, flowers, pictures, statues, books, and in reach of those great galleries that fill every requisition of their taste for art and make it theirs to enjoy the past as well as present.

They live for each other, not for society; not idly, but co-workers in literature and art. Trevor had long been a devout member of the Church of England, and the wife and husband kneel at the same altar.

The struggles of doubt and rebellion are laid to rest, that involved so long the soul of Hester Lynne in dangerous darkness. She strives not, but submits; she questions not, but believes; and has learned to see in everything the inscrutable wisdom of God.

Children have sprung around the knees of Hester Trevor with faces that artists pause to marvel at, and

forms of grace and beauty such as the Greeks themselves have never surpassed even in their indications of the ideal.

The beauty of the parents has met in marvellous perfection in those seraph aspects, and the sound of their joyous voices and glancing feet makes music in the marble halls of the "Palazzo Trevori," their lovely Florentine home.

They will never return to Briarheath, the pair who have found at last a congenial atmosphere in a foreign land; and there is sage talk among the elders of Lynnesborough of purchasing that property for a theological seminary.

It is a valuable estate now, for the town, dormant so long, was revived by the tramp of war and has grown out to the edge of its fields and woodlands, and Briarheath is no longer situated in a suburb; yet Hester still clings to the homestead of her father.

Mulgrave prospers and is happy, with his uncongenial but devoted wife, at last, since children have come to link their interests indissolubly, children cross and crafty like their parents, yet charming in the eyes of those whose qualities and aspects have found through them transmission.

Sophy Sutton still snarls at Sliding Stone, but her husband, through his meek persistence in living there, thrives at last, and is building a modest mansion, the furniture for which will be sent him by Mrs. Trevor when it is completed.

Bellair and Mattie are in full tide of success in their "eye infirmary," and as wife and mother our little imp of intrigue and impertinence possesses few superiors; and

Sydney Lynne, married and still at Briarheath, represents the family name with honor and distinction.

Hester Trevor has now but one enemy to contend with, the proneness of her spirit to idolatry, where a more moderate affection would better ensure her permanent happiness.

Yet is she blessed even in yielding to this sweetest, last, and most of all others to be feared, *temptation*.

THE END.

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